DECEMBER, 1934

Weird Tales

A WITCH SHALL BE BORN

Dark Magic • Mad Passion
Red Carnage

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

CLARK ASHTON SMITH
BASSETT MORGAN
C. L. MOORE

DEC. 25c

WEIRD TALES

Printed in U. S. A.

Vol. 24, No. 6—25c

MAIL THIS NOW

"PSYCHIANA"
Dept. WT-12
Moscow, Idaho

Please send me FREE your 6,000 word treatise in which Dr. Robinson explains how he learned to commune with the Living God, using this mighty power for health, happiness, and success.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____

Cut out this coupon and mail it to Psychiana, Moscow, Ida.

FREE - - FREE

"MAN CAN TALK WITH GOD"— *says noted psychologist*

"PSYCHIANA"

A new and revolutionary religious teaching based entirely on the misunderstood sayings of the Galilean Carpenter, and designed to show how to find and use the same identical power that He used.

Dr. Frank B. Robinson
Founder of "Psychiana" and author of "The God Nobody Knows"

"PSYCHIANA" *believes and teaches as follows:*

FIRST—That there is no such thing as a "subconscious mind."

SECOND—That there is, in this universe, a FAR MORE POTENT and DYNAMIC POWER, the manifestations of which have been erroneously credited to some other supposed power called the "subconscious mind."

THIRD—That this INVISIBLE, DYNAMIC Power is THE VERY SAME POWER that JESUS USED when He staggered the nations by His so-called "miracles," and by raising the dead.

FOURTH—That Jesus had NO MONOPOLY on this Power.

FIFTH—That it is possible for EVERY NORMAL human being understanding spiritual law as He understood it, TO DUPLICATE EVERY WORK THAT THIS CARPENTER OF GALILEE EVER DID. When He said: "The things that I do shall YE DO ALSO"—He meant EXACTLY WHAT HE SAID.

SIXTH—That this dynamic Power is NOT TO BE FOUND "within," but has its source in a far different direction.

SEVENTH—THAT THE WORDS OF THIS GALILEAN CARPENTER WENT A THOUSAND MILES OVER THE HEADS OF HIS HEARERS 2,000 YEARS AGO, AND ARE STILL A THOUSAND MILES OVER THE HEADS OF THOSE WHO PROFESS TO FOLLOW HIM TODAY.

EIGHTH—That this same MIGHTY, INVISIBLE, PULSATING, THROBBING POWER can be used by anyone—AT ANY HOUR OF THE DAY OR NIGHT—and without such methods as "going into a silence" or "gazing at bright objects," etc.

NINTH—That when once understood and correctly used, this mighty Power is ABUNDANTLY ABLE, AND NEVER FAILS TO GIVE HEALTH, HAPPINESS and OVERWHELMING SUCCESS in whatever proper line it may be desired.

DR. FRANK B. ROBINSON

considered by many to be one of the keenest psychological minds this country has ever produced, and one of the most earnest, intense searchers into the spiritual realm, believes, after years of experimentation and research, that there is in this world today, an UNSEEN power or force, so dynamic in itself, that all other powers or forces FADE INTO INSIGNIFICANCE BESIDE IT. He believes that this power or force is THE VERY SAME POWER THAT JESUS USED. He believes further that the entire world, including the present church structure, MISSED IN ITS ENTIRETY the message that He came to bring. He believes that

The world is on the verge of the most stupendous spiritual upheaval it has ever experienced.

Every reader of this magazine is cordially invited to write "PSYCHIANA" for more details of this revolutionary teaching which might very easily be discussed the ENTIRE WORLD AROUND. Dr. Robinson will tell you something of his years of search for the truth as he KNEW it must exist, and will give you a few facts connected with the founding of "PSYCHIANA." NO OBLIGATIONS WHATSOEVER. Sign your name and address above.

Copyright 1933, Dr. Frank B. Robinson

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 24 — CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER, 1934 — Number 6

Cover Design . . . . . M. Brundage
Illustrating a scene in "A Witch Shall Be Born"

A Witch Shall Be Born . . . . . Robert E. Howard 658
A tale of eld—a vivid weird novelette of uncanny power

The Vengeance of Ti Fong . . . . . Bassett Morgan 687
A tale of the weird genius of a Chinese scientist who had mastered too many of Nature's laws

Black God's Shadow . . . . . C. L. Moore 701
Another fascinating story about Jirel of Joiry, who went down into darkness to release a soul from torment

The Graveyard Duchess . . . . . John Flanders 719
The story of a ghastly horror that stalked through a cemetery at night

Solitude . . . . . Roderic Papineau 725
Verse

Xeethra . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 726
An exquisite tale of a goatherd who gained and lost a kingdom

The Trail of the Cloven Hoof (part 6) . . . . . Arlton Eadie 739
An astounding weird mystery novel by a British master of thrilling fiction

Fog . . . . . Mary C. Shaw 759
Verse

The Werewolf's Howl . . . . . Brooke Byrne 760
A short story of the eldritch doom that awaited the baron when his time came to die

A Matter of Faith . . . . . August W. Derleth and Mark Schorer 765
An African story of native magic and the ghastly Blue Death

Weird Story Reprint:
Pale Pink Porcelain . . . . . Frank Owen 771
An eery Chinese tale by a favorite WEIRD TALES master of fantastic fiction

The Eyrie 776
An informal chat with the readers

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $3.00 a year in the United States, $4.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeants' Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1934, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"The horror collapsed and rolled down the steps, as dead as the witch who had summoned it."

A Witch Shall Be Born

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A vivid weird novelette of uncanny power and fascinating episodes—a tale of the old, forgotten times

1. The Blood-Red Crescent

TARAMIS, Queen of Khauran, awakened from a dream-haunted slumber to a silence that seemed more like the stillness of nighted catacombs than the normal quiet of a sleeping palace. She lay staring into the darkness, wondering why the candles in their golden candelabra had gone out. A flecking of stars marked a gold-barred casement that lent no illumination to the interior of the chamber. But as Taramis

lay there, she became aware of a spot of radiance glowing in the darkness before her. She watched, puzzled. It grew and its intensity deepened as it expanded, a widening disk of lurid light hovering against the dark velvet hangings of the opposite wall. Taramis caught her breath, starting up to a sitting position. A dark object was visible in that circle of light—*a human head.*

In a sudden panic the queen opened her lips to cry out for her maids; then she checked herself. The glow was more lurid, the head more vividly limned. It was a woman's head, small, delicately molded, superbly poised, with a high-piled mass of lustrous black hair. The face grew distinct as she stared—and it was the sight of this face which froze the cry in Taramis' throat. The features were her own! She might have been looking into a mirror which subtly altered her reflection, lending it a tigerish gleam of eye, a vindictive curl of lip.

"Ishtar!" gasped Taramis. "I am bewitched!"

Appallingly, the apparition spoke, and its voice was like honeyed venom.

"Bewitched? No, sweet sister! Here is no sorcery."

"Sister?" stammered the bewildered girl. "I have no sister."

"You never had a sister?" came the sweet, poisonously mocking voice. "Never a twin sister whose flesh was as soft as yours to caress or hurt?"

"Why, once I had a sister," answered Taramis, still convinced that she was in the grip of some sort of nightmare. "But she died."

The beautiful face in the disk was convulsed with the aspect of a fury; so hellish became its expression that Taramis, cowering back, half expected to see snaky locks writhe hissing about the ivory brow.

Back in 1925, when Robert E. Howard was a college student, specializing in anthropology, he sent to Weird Tales a little story about the cavemen. That was his first published tale. Since that was printed, he has had forty stories in Weird Tales alone, and has gained an enormous following among the readers of this magazine. Many thousands of readers eagerly buy any magazine that features one of Mr. Howard's stories. Though his work has appeared in many other periodicals, the choice pick of his fascinating stories are printed solely in Weird Tales. He has the faculty of making real characters of his heroes, not mere automatons who act as they do merely because the author pulls the strings. Conan the barbarian adventurer, gone berserk, raging mad with the red lust of combat; King Kull, the strange ruler of the fabled land of Valusia; Solomon Kane, the dour English Puritan and righter of wrongs, who lived by his sword; Skuliface, the most villainous villain of them all—these are literary creations that fairly live and breathe, so graphically does the author portray them. Mr. Howard is at his best in the strange and thrilling—and at times blood-chilling—novelette that is printed herewith: "A Witch Shall Be Born." We commend this story to you, for you will find it well worth reading.

"You lie!" The accusation was spat from between the snarling red lips. "She did not die! Fool! Oh, enough of this mummery! Look—and let your sight be blasted!"

Light ran suddenly along the hang-

ings like flaming serpents, and incredibly the candles in the golden sticks flared up again. Taramis crouched on her velvet couch, her lithe legs flexed beneath her, staring wide-eyed at the pantherish figure which posed mockingly before her. It was as if she gazed upon another Taramis, identical with herself in every contour of feature and limb, yet animated by an alien and evil personality. The face of this stranger waif reflected the opposite of every characteristic the countenance of the queen denoted. Lust and mystery sparkled in her scintillant eyes, cruelty lurked in the curl of her full red lips. Each movement of her supple body was subtly suggestive. Her coiffure imitated that of the queen's, on her feet were gilded sandals such as Taramis wore in her boudoir. The sleeveless, low-necked silk tunic, girdled at the waist with a cloth-of-gold cincture, was a duplicate of the queen's night-garment.

"Who are you?" gasped Taramis, an icy chill she could not explain creeping along her spine. "Explain your presence before I call my ladies-in-waiting to summon the guard!"

"Scream until the roof-beams crack," callously answered the stranger. "Your sluts will not wake till dawn, though the palace spring into flames about them. Your guardsmen will not hear your squeals; they have been sent out of this wing of the palace."

"What!" exclaimed Taramis, stiffening with outraged majesty. "Who dared give my guardsmen such a command?"

"I did, sweet sister," sneered the other girl. "A little while ago, before I entered. They thought it was their darling adored queen. Ha! How beautifully I acted the part! With what imperious dignity, softened by womanly sweetness, did I address the great louts who knelt in their armor and plumed helmets!"

TARAMIS felt as if a stifling net of bewilderment were being drawn about her.

"Who are you?" she cried desperately. "What madness is this? Why do you come here?"

"Who am I?" There was the spite of a she-cobra's hiss in the soft response. The girl stepped to the edge of the couch, grasped the queen's white shoulders with fierce fingers, and bent to glare full into the startled eyes of Taramis. And under the spell of that hypnotic glare, the queen forgot to resent the unprecedented outrage of violent hands laid on regal flesh.

"Fool!" gritted the girl between her teeth. "Can you ask? Can you wonder? I am Salome!"

"Salome!" Taramis breathed the word, and the hairs prickled on her scalp as she realized the incredible, numbing truth of the statement. "I thought you died within the hour of your birth," she said feebly.

"So thought many," answered the woman who called herself Salome. "They carried me into the desert to die, damn them! I, a mewing, puling babe whose life was so young it was scarcely the flicker of a candle. And do you know why they bore me forth to die?"

"I—I have heard the story——" faltered Taramis.

Salome laughed fiercely, and slapped her bosom. The low-necked tunic left the upper parts of her firm breasts bare, and between them there shone a curious mark—a crescent, red as blood.

"The mark of the witch!" cried Taramis, recoiling.

"Aye!" Salome's laughter was dagger-edged with hate. "The curse of the kings of Khauran! Aye, they tell the tale in the market-places, with wagging beards and rolling eyes, the pious fools! They tell how the first queen of our line

had traffic with a fiend of darkness and bore him a daughter who lives in foul legendry to this day. And thereafter in each century a girl baby was born into the Askhaurian dynasty, with a scarlet half-moon between her breasts, that signified her destiny.

" 'Every century a witch shall be born.' So ran the ancient curse. And so it has come to pass. Some were slain at birth, as they sought to slay me. Some walked the earth as witches, proud daughters of Khauran, with the moon of hell burning upon their ivory bosoms. Each was named Salome. I too am Salome. It was always Salome, the witch. It will always be Salome, the witch, even when the mountains of ice have roared down from the pole and ground the civilizations to ruin, and a new world has risen from the ashes and dust—even then there shall be Salomes to walk the earth, to trap men's hearts by their sorcery, to dance before the kings of the world, and see the heads of the wise men fall at their pleasure."

"But—but you——" stammered Taramis.

"I?" The scintillant eyes burned like dark fires of mystery. "They carried me into the desert far from the city, and laid me naked on the hot sand, under the flaming sun. And then they rode away and left me for the jackals and the vultures and the desert wolves.

"But the life in me was stronger than the life in common folk, for it partakes of the essence of the forces that seethe in the black gulfs beyond mortal ken. The hours passed, and the sun slashed down like the molten flames of hell, but I did not die—aye, something of that torment I remember, faintly and far away, as one remembers a dim, formless dream. Then there were camels, and yellow-skinned men who wore silk robes and spoke in a weird tongue. Strayed from the caravan road, they passed close by, and their leader saw me, and recognized the scarlet crescent on my bosom. He took me up and gave me life.

"He was a magician from far Khitai, returning to his native kingdom after a journey to Stygia. He took me with him to purple-towered Paikang, its minarets rising amid the vine-festooned jungles of bamboo, and there I grew to womanhood under his teaching. Age had steeped him deep in black wisdom, not weakened his powers of evil. Many things he taught me——"

She paused, smiling enigmatically, with wicked mystery gleaming in her dark eyes. Then she tossed her head.

"He drove me from him at last, saying that I was but a common witch in spite of his teachings, and not fit to command the mighty sorcery he would have taught me. He would have made me queen of the world and ruled the nations through me, he said, but I was only a harlot of darkness. But what of it? I could never endure to seclude myself in a golden tower, and spend the long hours staring into a crystal globe, mumbling over incantations written on serpent's skin in the blood of virgins, poring over musty volumes in forgotten languages.

"He said I was but an earthly sprite, knowing naught of the deeper gulfs of cosmic sorcery. Well, this world contains all I desire—power, and pomp, and glittering pageantry, handsome men and soft women for my paramours and my slaves. He had told me who I was, of the curse and my heritage. I have returned to take that to which I have as much right as you. Now it is mine by right of possession."

"WHAT do you mean?" Taramis sprang up and faced her sister, stung out of her bewilderment and fright.

"Do you imagine that by drugging a few of my maids and tricking a few of my guardsmen you have established a claim to the throne of Khauran? Do not forget that *I* am queen of Khauran! I shall give you a place of honor, as my sister, but——"

Salome laughed hatefully.

"How generous of you, dear, sweet sister! But before you begin putting me in my place—perhaps you will tell me whose soldiers camp in the plain outside the city walls?"

"They are the Shemitish mercenaries of Constantius, the Kothic *voivode* of the Free Companies."

"And what do they in Khauran?" cooed Salome.

Taramis felt that she was being subtly mocked, but she answered with an assumption of dignity which she scarcely felt.

"Constantius asked permission to pass along the borders of Khauran on his way to Turan. He himself is hostage for their good behavior as long as they are within my domains."

"And Constantius," pursued Salome. "Did he not ask your hand today?"

Taramis shot her a clouded glance of suspicion.

"How did you know that?"

An insolent shrug of the slim naked shoulders was the only reply.

"You refused, dear sister?"

"Certainly I refused!" exclaimed Taramis angrily. "Do you, an Askhaurian princess yourself, suppose that the queen of Khauran could treat such a proposal with anything but disdain? Wed a bloody-handed adventurer, a man exiled from his own kingdom because of his crimes, and the leader of organized plunderers and hired murderers?

"I should never have allowed him to bring his black-bearded slayers into Khauran. But he is virtually a prisoner in the south tower, guarded by my soldiers. Tomorrow I shall bid him order his troops to leave the kingdom. He himself shall be kept captive until they are over the border. Meantime, my soldiers man the walls of the city, and I have warned him that he will answer for any outrages perpetrated on the villagers or shepherds by his mercenaries."

"He is confined in the south tower?" asked Salome.

"That is what I said. Why do you ask?"

For answer Salome clapped her hands, and lifting her voice, with a gurgle of cruel mirth in it, called: "The queen grants you an audience, Falcon!"

A gold-arabesqued door opened and a tall figure entered the chamber, at the sight of which Taramis cried out in amazement and anger.

"Constantius! You dare enter my chamber!"

"As you see, Your Majesty!" He bent his dark, hawk-like head in mock humility.

Constantius, whom men called Falcon, was tall, broad-shouldered, slim-waisted, lithe and strong as pliant steel. He was handsome in an aquiline, ruthless way. His face was burnt dark by the sun, and his hair, which grew far back from his high, narrow forehead, was black as a raven. His dark eyes were penetrating and alert, the hardness of his thin lips not softened by his thin black mustache. His boots were of Kordavan leather, his hose and doublet of plain, dark silk, tarnished with the wear of the camps and the stains of armor rust.

Twisting his mustache, he let his gaze travel up and down the shrinking queen with an effrontery that made her wince.

"By Ishtar, Taramis," he said silkily, "I find you more alluring in your night-

tunic than in your queenly robes. Truly, this is an auspicious night!"

Fear grew in the queen's dark eyes. She was no fool; she knew that Constantius would never dare this outrage unless he was sure of himself.

"You are mad!" she said. "If I am in your power in this chamber, you are no less in the power of my subjects, who will rend you to pieces if you touch me. Go at once, if you would live."

Both laughed mockingly, and Salome made an impatient gesture.

"Enough of this farce; let us on to the next act in the comedy. Listen, dear sister: it was I who sent Constantius here. When I decided to take the throne of Khauran, I cast about for a man to aid me, and chose the Falcon, because of his utter lack of all characteristics men call good."

"I am overwhelmed, princess," murmured Constantius sardonically, with a profound bow.

"I sent him to Khauran, and, once his men were camped in the plain outside, and he was in the palace, I entered the city by that small gate in the west wall —the fools guarding it thought it was you returning from some nocturnal adventure——"

"You hell-cat!" Taramis' cheeks flamed and her resentment got the better of her regal reserve.

Salome smiled hardly.

"They were properly surprized and shocked, but admitted me without question. I entered the palace the same way, and gave the order to the surprized guards that sent them marching away, as well as the men who guarded Constantius in the south tower. Then I came here, attending to the ladies-in-waiting on the way."

Taramis' fingers clenched and she paled.

"Well, what next?" she asked in a shaky voice.

"Listen!" Salome inclined her head. Faintly through the casement there came the clank of marching men in armor; gruff voices shouted in an alien tongue, and cries of alarm mingled with the shouts.

"The people awaken and grow fearful," said Constantius sardonically. "You had better go and reassure them, Salome!"

"Call me Taramis," answered Salome. "We must become accustomed to it."

"What have you done?" cried Taramis. "What have you done?"

"I have gone to the gates and ordered the soldiers to open them," answered Salome. "They were astounded, but they obeyed. That is the Falcon's army you hear, marching into the city."

"You devil!" cried Taramis. "You have betrayed my people, in my guise! You have made me seem a traitor! Oh, I shall go to them——"

With a cruel laugh Salome caught her wrist and jerked her back. The magnificent suppleness of the queen was helpless against the vindictive strength that steeled Salome's slender limbs.

"You know how to reach the dungeons from the palace, Constantius?" said the witch-girl. "Good. Take this spitfire and lock her into the strongest cell. The jailers are all sound in drugged sleep. I saw to that. Send a man to cut their throats before they can awaken. None must ever know what has occurred tonight. Thenceforward I am Taramis, and Taramis is a nameless prisoner in an unknown dungeon."

Constantius smiled with a glint of strong white teeth under his thin mustache.

"Very good; but you would not deny me a little—ah—amusement first?"

"Not I! Tame the scornful hussy as you will." With a wicked laugh Salome flung her sister into the Kothian's arms, and turned away through the door that opened into the outer corridor.

Fright widened Taramis' lovely eyes, her supple figure rigid and straining against Constantius' embrace. She forgot the men marching in the streets, forgot the outrage to her queenship, in the face of the menace to her womanhood. She forgot all sensations but terror and shame as she faced the complete cynicism of Constantius' burning, mocking eyes, felt his hard arms crushing her writhing body.

Salome, hurrying along the corridor outside, smiled spitefully as a scream of despair and agony rang shuddering through the palace.

2. *The Tree of Death*

THE young soldier's hose and shirt were smeared with dried blood, wet with sweat and gray with dust. Blood oozed from the deep gash in his thigh, from the cuts on his breast and shoulder. Perspiration glistened on his livid face and his fingers were knotted in the cover of the divan on which he lay. Yet his words reflected mental suffering that outweighed physical pain.

"She must be mad!" he repeated again and again, like one still stunned by some monstrous and incredible happening. "It's like a nightmare! Taramis, whom all Khauran loves, betraying her people to that devil from Koth! Oh, Ishtar, why was I not slain? Better die than live to see our queen turn traitor and harlot!"

"Lie still, Valerius," begged the girl who was washing and bandaging his wounds with trembling hands. "Oh, please lie still, darling! You will make your wounds worse. I dared not summon a leech——"

"No," muttered the wounded youth. "Constantius' blue-bearded devils will be searching the quarters for wounded Khaurani; they'll hang every man who has wounds to show he fought against them. Oh, Taramis, how could you betray the people who worshipped you?" In his fierce agony he writhed, weeping in rage and shame, and the terrified girl caught him in her arms, straining his tossing head against her bosom, imploring him to be quiet.

"Better death than the black shame that has come upon Khauran this day," he groaned. "Did you see it, Ivga?"

"No, Valerius." Her soft, nimble fingers were again at work, gently cleansing and closing the gaping edges of his raw wounds. "I was awakened by the noise of fighting in the streets—I looked out a casement and saw the Shemites cutting down people; then presently I heard you calling me faintly from the alley door."

"I had reached the limits of my strength," he muttered! "I fell in the alley and could not rise. I knew they'd find me soon if I lay there—I killed three of the blue-bearded beasts, by Ishtar! They'll never swagger through Khauran's streets, by the gods! The fiends are tearing their hearts in hell!"

The trembling girl crooned soothingly to him, as to a wounded child, and closed his panting lips with her own cool sweet mouth. But the fire that raged in his soul would not allow him to lie silent.

"I was not on the wall when the Shemites entered," he burst out. "I was asleep in the barracks, with the others not on duty. It was just before dawn when our captain entered, and his face was pale under his helmet. 'The Shemites are in the city,' he said. 'The queen came to the southern gate and gave orders that they should be admitted. She made the

men come down from the walls, where they've been on guard since Constantius entered the kingdom. I don't understand it, and neither does anyone else, but I heard her give the order, and we obeyed as we always do. We are ordered to assemble in the square before the palace. Form ranks outside the barracks and march—leave your arms and armor here. Ishtar knows what this means, but it is the queen's order.'

"Well, when we came to the square the Shemites were drawn up on foot opposite the palace, ten thousand of the blue-bearded devils, fully armed, and people's heads were thrust out of every window and door on the square. The streets leading into the square were thronged by bewildered folk. Taramis was standing on the steps of the palace, alone except for Constantius, who stood stroking his mustache like a great lean cat who has just devoured a sparrow. But fifty Shemites with bows in their hands were ranged below them.

"That's where the queen's guard should have been, but they were drawn up at the foot of the palace stair, as puzzled as we, though they had come fully armed, in spite of the queen's order.

"Taramis spoke to us then, and told us that she had reconsidered the proposal made her by Constantius—why, only yesterday she threw it in his teeth in open court!—and that she had decided to make him her royal consort. She did not explain why she had brought the Shemites into the city so treacherously. But she said that, as Constantius had control of a body of professional fighting-men, the army of Khauran would no longer be needed, and therefore she disbanded it, and ordered us to go quietly to our homes.

"Why, obedience to our queen is second nature to us, but we were struck dumb and found no word to answer. We broke ranks almost before we knew what we were doing, like men in a daze.

"But when the palace guard was ordered to disarm likewise and disband, the captain of the guard, Conan, interrupted. Men said he was off duty the night before, and drunk. But he was wide awake now. He shouted to the guardsmen to stand as they were until they received an order from him—and such is his dominance of his men, that they obeyed in spite of the queen. He strode up to the palace steps and glared at Taramis—and then he roared: 'This is not the queen! This isn't Taramis! It's some devil in masquerade!'

"Then hell was to pay! I don't know just what happened. I think a Shemite struck Conan, and Conan killed him. The next instant the square was a battleground. The Shemites fell on the guardsmen, and their spears and arrows struck down many soldiers who had already disbanded.

"Some of us grabbed up such weapons as we could and fought back. We hardly knew what we were fighting for, but it was against Constantius and his devils—not against Taramis, I swear it! Constantius shouted to cut the traitors down. We were not traitors!" Despair and bewilderment shook his voice. The girl murmured pityingly, not understanding it all, but aching in sympathy with her lover's suffering.

"THE people did not know which side to take. It was a madhouse of confusion and bewilderment. We who fought didn't have a chance, in no formation, without armor and only half armed. The guards were fully armed and drawn up in a square, but there were only five hundred of them. They took a heavy toll before they were cut down,

but there could be only one conclusion to such a battle. And while her people were being slaughtered before her, Taramis stood on the palace steps, with Constantius' arm about her waist, and laughed like a heartless, beautiful fiend! Gods, it's all mad—mad!

"I never saw a man fight as Conan fought. He put his back to the courtyard wall, and before they overpowered him the dead men were strewn in heaps thigh-deep about him. But at last they dragged him down, a hundred against one. When I saw him fall I dragged myself away feeling as if the world had burst under my very fingers. I heard Constantius call to his dogs to take the captain alive — stroking his mustache, with that hateful smile on his lips!"

That smile was on the lips of Constantius at that very moment. He sat his horse among a cluster of his men—thick-bodied Shemites with curled blue-black beards and hooked noses; the low-swinging sun struck glints from their peaked helmets and the silvered scales of their corselets. Nearly a mile behind, the walls and towers of Khauran rose sheer out of the meadowlands.

By the side of the caravan road a heavy cross had been planted, and on this grim tree a man hung, nailed there by iron spikes through his hands and feet. Naked but for a loin-cloth, the man was almost a giant in stature, and his muscles stood out in thick corded ridges on limbs and body, which the sun had long ago burned brown. The perspiration of agony beaded his face and his mighty breast, but from under the tangled black mane that fell over his low, broad forehead, his blue eyes blazed with an unquenched fire. Blood oozed sluggishly from the lacerations in his hands and feet.

Constantius saluted him mockingly.

"I am sorry, captain," he said, "that I can not remain to ease your last hours, but I have duties to perform in yonder city—I must not keep our delicious queen waiting!" He laughed softly. "So I leave you to your own devices—and those beauties!" He pointed meaningly at the black shadows which swept incessantly back and forth, high above.

"Were it not for them, I imagine that a powerful brute like yourself should live on the cross for days. Do not cherish any illusions of rescue because I am leaving you unguarded. I have had it proclaimed that anyone seeking to take your body, living or dead, from the cross, will be flayed alive together with all the members of his family, in the public square. I am so firmly established in Khauran that my order is as good as a regiment of guardsmen. I am leaving no guard, because the vultures will not approach as long as anyone is near, and I do not wish them to feel any constraint. That is also why I brought you so far from the city. These desert vultures approach the walls no closer than this spot.

"And so, brave captain, farewell! I will remember you when, in an hour, Taramis lies in my arms."

Blood started afresh from the pierced palms as the victim's mallet-like fists clenched convulsively on the spike-heads. Knots and bunches of muscle started out on the massive arms, and Conan bent his head forward and spat savagely at Constantius' face. The *voivode* laughed coolly, wiped the saliva from his gorget and reined his horse about.

"Remember me when the vultures are tearing at your living flesh," he called mockingly. "The desert scavengers are a particularly voracious breed. I have seen men hang for hours on a cross, eyeless, earless, and scalpless, before the sharp beaks had eaten their way into his vitals."

Without a backward glance he rode toward the city, a supple, erect figure, gleaming in his burnished armor, his stolid, bearded henchmen jogging beside him. A faint rising of dust from the worn trail marked their passing.

The man hanging on the cross was the one touch of sentient life in a landscape that seemed desolate and deserted in the late evening. Khauran, less than a mile away, might have been on the other side of the world, and existing in another age.

SHAKING the sweat out of his eyes, Conan stared blankly at the familiar terrain. On either side of the city, and beyond it, stretched the fertile meadowlands, with cattle browsing in the distance where fields and vineyards checkered the plain. The western and northern horizons were dotted with villages, miniature in the distance. A lesser distance to the southeast a silvery gleam marked the course of a river, and beyond that river sandy desert began abruptly to stretch away and away beyond the horizon. Conan stared at that expanse of empty waste shimmering tawnily in the late sunlight as a trapped hawk stares at the open sky. A revulsion shook him when he glanced at the gleaming towers of Khauran. The city had betrayed him —trapped him into circumstances that left him hanging to a wooden cross like a hare nailed to a tree.

A red lust for vengeance swept away the thought. Curses ebbed fitfully from the man's lips. All his universe contracted, focused, became incorporated in the four iron spikes that held him from life and freedom. His great muscles quivered, knotting like iron cables. With the sweat starting out on his graying skin, he sought to gain leverage, to tear the nails from the wood. It was useless. They had been driven deep. Then he tried to tear his hands off the spikes, and it was not the knifing, abysmal agony that finally caused him to cease his efforts, but the futility of it. The spike-heads were broad and heavy; he could not drag them through the wounds. A surge of helplessness shook the giant, for the first time in his life. He hung motionless, his head resting on his breast, shutting his eyes against the aching glare of the sun.

A beat of wings caused him to look up, just as a feathered shadow shot down out of the sky. A keen beak, stabbing at his eyes, cut his cheek, and he jerked his head aside, shutting his eyes involuntarily. He shouted, a croaking, desperate shout of menace, and the vultures swerved away and retreated, frightened by the sound. They resumed their wary circling above his head. Blood trickled over Conan's mouth, and he licked his lips involuntarily, spat at the salty taste.

Thirst assailed him savagely. He had drunk deeply of wine the night before, and no water had touched his lips since before the battle in the square, that dawn. And killing was thirsty, salt-sweaty work. He glared at the distant river as a man in hell glares through the opened grille. He thought of gushing freshets of white water he had breasted, laved to the shoulders in liquid jade. He remembered great horns of foaming ale, jacks of sparkling wine gulped carelessly or spilled on the tavern floor. He bit his lip to keep from bellowing in intolerable anguish as a tortured animal bellows.

The sun sank, a lurid ball in a fiery sea of blood. Against a crimson rampart that banded the horizon the towers of the city floated unreal as a dream. The very sky was tinged with blood to his misted glare. He licked his blackened lips and stared with bloodshot eyes at the distant river. It too seemed crimson like blood,

and the shadows crawling up from the east seemed black as ebony.

In his dulled ears sounded the louder beat of wings. Lifting his head he watched with the burning glare of a wolf the shadows wheeling above him. He knew that his shouts would frighten them away no longer. One dipped—dipped—lower and lower. Conan drew his head back as far as he could, waiting with terrible patience. The vulture swept in with a swift roar of wings. Its beak flashed down, ripping the skin on Conan's chin as he jerked his head aside; then before the bird could flash away, Conan's head lunged forward on his mighty neck muscles, and his teeth, snapping like those of a wolf, locked on the bare, wattled neck.

Instantly the vulture exploded into squawking, flapping hysteria. Its thrashing wings blinded the man, and its talons ripped his chest. But grimly he hung on, the muscles starting out in lumps on his jaws. And the scavenger's neck-bones crunched between those powerful teeth. With a spasmodic flutter the bird hung limp. Conan let go, spat blood from his mouth. The other vultures, terrified by the fate of their companion, were in full flight to a distant tree, where they perched liks black demons in conclave.

Ferocious triumph surged through Conan's numbed brain. Life beat strongly and savagely through his veins. He could still deal death; he still lived. Every twinge of sensation, even of agony, was a negation of death.

"By Mitra!" Either a voice spoke, or he suffered from hallucination. "In all my life I have never seen such a thing!"

SHAKING the sweat and blood from his eyes, Conan saw four horsemen sitting their steeds in the twilight and staring up at him. Three were lean, white-robed hawks, Zuagir tribesmen without a doubt, nomads from beyond the river. The other was dressed like them in a white, girdled *khalat* and a flowing head-dress which, banded about the temples with a triple circlet of braided camel-hair, fell to his shoulders. But he was not a Shemite. The dusk was not so thick, nor Conan's hawk-like sight so clouded, that he could not perceive the man's facial characteristics.

He was as tall as Conan, though not so heavy-limbed. His shoulders were broad and his supple figure was hard as steel and whalebone. A short black beard did not altogether mask the aggressive jut of his lean jaw, and gray eyes cold and piercing as a sword gleamed from the shadow of the *kafieh*. Quieting his restless steed with a quick, sure hand, this man spoke: "By Mitra, I should know this man!"

"Aye!" It was the guttural accents of a Zuagir. "It is the Cimmerian who was captain of the queen's guard!"

"She must be casting off all her old favorites," muttered the rider. "Who'd have ever thought it of Queen Taramis? I'd rather have had a long, bloody war. It would have given us desert folk a chance to plunder. As it is we've come this close to the walls and found only this nag"—he glanced at a fine gelding led by one of the nomads—"and this dying dog."

Conan lifted his bloody head.

"If I could come down from this beam I'd make a dying dog out of you, you Zaporoskan thief!" he rasped through blackened lips.

"Mitra, the knave knows me!" exclaimed the other. "How, knave, do you know me?"

"There's only one of your breed in these parts," muttered Conan. "You are Olgerd Vladislav, the outlaw chief."

"Aye! and once a hetman of the *kozaki* of the Zaporoskan River, as you have guessed. Would you like to live?"

"Only a fool would ask that question," panted Conan.

"I am a hard man," said Olgerd, "and toughness is the only quality I respect in a man. I shall judge if you are a man, or only a dog after all, fit only to lie here and die."

"If we cut him down we may be seen from the walls," objected one of the nomads.

Olgerd shook his head.

"The dusk is too deep. Here, take this ax, Djebal, and cut down the cross at the base."

"If it falls forward it will crush him," objected Djebal. "I can cut it so it will fall backward, but then the shock of the fall may crack his skull and tear loose all his entrails."

"If he's worthy to ride with me he'll survive it," answered Olgerd imperturbably. "If not, then he doesn't deserve to live. Cut!"

The first impact of the battle-ax against the wood and its accompanying vibrations sent lances of agony through Conan's swollen feet and hands. Again and again the blade fell, and each stroke reverberated on his bruised brain, setting his tortured nerves aquiver. But he set his teeth and made no sound. The ax cut through, the cross reeled on its splintered base and toppled backward. Conan made his whole body a solid knot of iron-hard muscle, jammed his head back hard against the wood and held it rigid there. The beam struck the ground heavily and rebounded slightly. The impact tore his wounds and dazed him for an instant. He fought the rushing tide of blackness, sick and dizzy, but realized that the iron muscles that sheathed his vitals had saved him from permanent injury.

And he had made no sound, though blood oozed from his nostrils and his belly-muscles quivered with nausea. With a grunt of approval Djebal bent over him with a pair of pincers used to draw horse-shoe nails, and gripped the head of the spike in Conan's right hand, tearing the skin to get a grip on the deeply embedded head. The pincers were small for that work. Djebal sweated and tugged, swearing and wrestling with the stubborn iron, working it back and forth—in swollen flesh as well as in wood. Blood started, oozing over the Cimmerian's fingers. He lay so still he might have been dead, except for the spasmodic rise and fall of his great chest. The spike gave way, and Djebal held up the blood-stained thing with a grunt of satisfaction, then flung it away and bent over the other.

The process was repeated, and then Djebal turned his attention to Conan's skewered feet. But the Cimmerian, struggling up to a sitting posture, wrenched the pincers from his fingers and sent him staggering backward with a violent shove. Conan's hands were swollen to almost twice their normal size. His fingers felt like misshapen thumbs, and closing his hands was an agony that brought blood streaming from under his grinding teeth. But somehow, clutching the pincers clumsily with both hands, he managed to wrench out first one spike and then the other. They were not driven so deeply into the wood as the others had been.

He rose stiffly and stood upright on his swollen, lacerated feet, swaying drunkenly, the icy sweat dripping from his face and body. Cramps assailed him and he clamped his jaws against the desire to retch.

Olgerd, watching him impersonally, motioned him toward the stolen horse. Conan stumbled toward it, and every step was a stabbing, throbbing hell that flecked

his lips with bloody foam. One misshapen, groping hand fell clumsily on the saddle-bow, a bloody foot somehow found the stirrup. Setting his teeth, he swung up, and he almost fainted in midair; but he came down in the saddle—and as he did so, Olgerd struck the horse sharply with his whip. The startled beast reared, and the man in the saddle swayed and slumped like a sack of sand, almost unseated. Conan had wrapped a rein about each hand, holding it in place with a clamping thumb. Drunkenly he exerted the strength of his knotted biceps, wrenching the horse down; it screamed, its jaw almost dislocated.

One of the Shemites lifted a water-flask questioningly.

Olgerd shook his head.

"Let him wait until we get to camp. It's only ten miles. If he's fit to live in the desert he'll live that long without a drink."

The group rode like swift ghosts toward the river; among them Conan swayed like a drunken man in the saddle, bloodshot eyes glazed, foam drying on his blackened lips.

3. *A Letter to Nemedia*

THE savant Astreas, traveling in the East in his never-tiring search for knowledge, wrote a letter to his friend and fellow-philosopher Alcemides, in his native Nemedia, which constitutes the entire knowledge of the Western nations concerning the events of that period in the East, always a hazy, half-mythical region in the minds of the Western folk.

Astreas wrote, in part: "You can scarcely conceive, my dear old friend, of the conditions now existing in this tiny kingdom since Queen Taramis admitted Constantius and his mercenaries, an event which I briefly described in my last, hurried letter. Seven months have passed since then, during which time it seems as though the devil himself had been loosed in this unfortunate realm. Taramis seems to have gone quite mad; whereas formerly she was famed for her virtue, justice and tranquillity, she is now notorious for qualities precisely opposite to those just enumerated. Her private life is a scandal—or perhaps 'private' is not the correct term, since the queen makes no attempt to conceal the debauchery of her court. She constantly indulges in the most infamous revelries, in which the unfortunate ladies of the court are forced to join, young married women as well as virgins.

"She herself has not bothered to marry her paramour, Constantius, who sits on the throne beside her and reigns as her royal consort, and his officers follow his example, and do not hesitate to debauch any woman they desire, regardless of her rank or station. The wretched kingdom groans under exorbitant taxation, the farms are stripped to the bone, and the merchants go in rags which are all that is left them by the tax-gatherers. Nay, they are lucky if they escape with a whole skin.

"I sense your incredulity, good Alcemides; you will fear that I exaggerate conditions in Khauran. Such conditions would be unthinkable in any of the Western countries, admittedly. But you must realize the vast difference that exists between West and East, especially this part of the East. In the first place, Khauran is a kingdom of no great size, one of the many principalities which at one time formed the eastern part of the empire of Koth, and which later regained the independence which was theirs at a still earlier age. This part of the world is made up of these tiny realms, diminutive in comparison with the great kingdoms of the West, or the great sultanates of

the farther East, but important in their control of the caravan routes, and in the wealth concentrated in them.

"KHAURAN is the most southeasterly of these principalities, bordering on the very deserts of eastern Shem. The city of Khauran is the only city of any magnitude in the realm, and stands within sight of the river which separates the grasslands from the sandy desert, like a watch-tower to guard the fertile meadows behind it. The land is so rich that it yields three and four crops a year, and the plains north and west of the city are dotted with villages. To one accustomed to the great plantations and stock-farms of the West, it is strange to see these tiny fields and vineyards; yet wealth in grain and fruit pours from them as from a horn of plenty. The villagers are agriculturists, nothing else. Of a mixed, aboriginal race, they are unwarlike, unable to protect themselves, and forbidden the possession of arms. Dependent wholly upon the soldiers of the city for protection, they are helpless under the present conditions. So the savage revolt of the rural sections, which would be a certainty in any Western nation, is here impossible.

"They toil supinely under the iron hand of Constantius, and his black-bearded Shemites ride incessantly through the fields, with whips in their hands, like the slave-drivers of the black serfs who toil in the plantations of southern Zingara.

"Nor do the people of the city fare any better. Their wealth is stripped from them, their fairest daughters taken to glut the insatiable lust of Constantius and his mercenaries. These men are utterly without mercy or compassion, possessed of all the characteristics our armies learned to abhor in our wars against the Shemitish allies of Argos—inhuman cruelty, lust, and wild-beast ferocity. The people of the city are Khauran's ruling caste, predominantly Hyborian, and valorous and war-like. But the treachery of their queen delivered them into the hands of their oppressors. The Shemites are the only armed force in Khauran, and the most hellish punishment is inflicted on any Khauran found possessing weapons. A systematic persecution to destroy the young Khaurani men able to bear arms has been savagely pursued. Many have ruthlessly been slaughtered, others sold as slaves to the Turanians. Thousands have fled the kingdom and either entered the service of other rulers, or become outlaws, lurking in numerous bands along the borders.

"At present there is some possibility of invasion from the desert, which is inhabited by tribes of Shemitish nomads. The mercenaries of Constantius are men from the Shemitish cities of the west, Pelishtim, Anakim, Akkharim, and are ardently hated by the Zuagirs and other wandering tribes. As you know, good Alcemides, the countries of these barbarians are divided into the western meadowlands which stretch to the distant ocean, and in which rise the cities of the town-dwellers, and the eastern deserts, where the lean nomads hold sway; there is incessant warfare between the dwellers of the cities and the dwellers of the desert.

"The Zuagirs have fought with and raided Khauran for centuries, without success, but they resent its conquest by their western kin. It is rumored that their natural antagonism is being fomented by the man who was formerly the captain of the queen's guard, and who, somehow escaping the hate of Constantius, who actually had him upon the cross, fled to the nomads. He is called Conan, and

is himself a barbarian, one of those gloomy Cimmerians whose ferocity our soldiers have more than once learned to their bitter cost. It is rumored that he has become the right-hand man of Olgerd Vladislav, the *kozak* adventurer who wandered down from the northern steppes and made himself chief of a band of Zuagirs. There are also rumors that this band has increased vastly in the last few months, and that Olgerd, incited no doubt by this Cimmerian, is even considering a raid on Khauran.

"It can not be anything more than a raid, as the Zuagirs are without siege-machines, or the knowledge of investing a city, and it has been proven repeatedly in the past that the nomads in their loose formation, or rather lack of formation, are no match in hand-to-hand fighting for the well-disciplined, fully-armed warriors of the Shemitish cities. The natives of Khauran would perhaps welcome this conquest, since the nomads could deal with them no more harshly than their present masters, and even total extermination would be preferable to the suffering they have to endure. But they are so cowed and helpless that they could give no aid to the invaders.

"Their plight is most wretched. Taramis, apparently possessed of a demon, stops at nothing. She has abolished the worship of Ishtar, and turned the temple into a shrine of idolatry. She has destroyed the ivory image of the goddess which these eastern Hyborians worship (and which, inferior as it is to the true religion of Mitra which we Western nations recognize, is still superior to the devil-worship of the Shemites) and filled the temple of Ishtar with obscene images of every imaginable sort—gods and goddesses of the night, portrayed in all the salacious and perverse poses and with all the revolting characteristics that a degenerate brain could conceive. Many of these images are to be identified as foul deities of the Shemites, the Turanians, the Vendhyans, and the Khitans, but others are reminiscent of a hideous and half-remembered antiquity, vile shapes forgotten except in the most obscure legends. Where the queen gained the knowledge of them I dare not even hazard a guess.

"She has instituted human sacrifice, and since her mating with Constantius, no less than five hundred men, women and children have been immolated. Some of these have died on the altar she has set up in the temple, herself wielding the sacrificial dagger, but most have met a more horrible doom.

"Taramis has placed some sort of monster in a crypt in the temple. What it is, and whence it came, none knows. But shortly after she had crushed the desperate revolt of her soldiers against Constantius, she spent a night alone in the desecrated temple, alone except for a dozen bound captives, and the shuddering people saw thick, foul-smelling smoke curling up from the dome, heard all night the frenetic chanting of the queen, and the agonized cries of her tortured captives; and toward dawn another voice mingled with these sounds—a strident, inhuman croaking that froze the blood of all who heard.

"In the full dawn Taramis reeled drunkenly from the temple, her eyes blazing with demoniac triumph. The captives were never seen again, nor the croaking voice heard. But there is a room in the temple into which none ever goes but the queen, driving a human sacrifice before her. And this victim is never seen again. All know that in that grim chamber lurks some monster from the black night of ages, which devours the shrieking humans Taramis delivers up to it.

"I CAN no longer think of her as a mortal woman, but as a rabid she-fiend, crouching in her blood-fouled lair amongst the bones and fragments of her victims, with taloned, crimsoned fingers. That the gods allow her to pursue her awful course unchecked almost shakes my faith in divine justice.

"When I compare her present conduct with her deportment when first I came to Khauran, seven months ago, I am confused with bewilderment, and almost inclined to the belief held by many of the people—that a demon has possessed the body of Taramis. A young soldier, Valerius, had another belief. He believed that a witch had assumed a form identical with that of Khauran's adored ruler. He believed that Taramis had been spirited away in the night, and confined in some dungeon, and that this being ruling in her place was but a female sorcerer. He swore that he would find the real queen, if she still lived, but I greatly fear that he himself has fallen victim to the cruelty of Constantius. He was implicated in the revolt of the palace guards, escaped and remained in hiding for some time, stubbornly refusing to seek safety abroad, and it was during this time that I encountered him and he told me his beliefs.

"But he has disappeared, as so many have, whose fate one dares not conjecture, and I fear he has been apprehended by the spies of Constantius.

"But I must conclude this letter and slip it out of the city by means of a swift carrier-pigeon, which will carry it to the post whence I purchased it, on the borders of Koth. By rider and camel-train it will eventually come to you. I must haste, before dawn. It is late, and the stars gleam whitely on the gardened roofs of Khauran. A shuddering silence envelops the city, in which I hear the throb of a sullen drum from the distant temple. I doubt not that Taramis is there, concocting more deviltry."

But the savant was incorrect in his conjecture concerning the whereabouts of the woman he called Taramis. The girl whom the world knew as queen of Khauran stood in a dungeon, lighted only by a flickering torch which played on her features, etching the diabolical cruelty of her beautiful countenance.

On the bare stone floor before her crouched a figure whose nakedness was scarcely covered with tattered rags.

This figure Salome touched contemptuously with the upturned toe of her gilded sandal, and smiled vindictively as her victim shrank away.

"You do not love my caresses, sweet sister?"

Taramis was still beautiful, in spite of her rags and the imprisonment and abuse of seven weary months. She did not reply to her sister's taunts, but bent her head as one grown accustomed to mockery.

THIS resignation did not please Salome. She bit her red lip, and stood tapping the toe of her shoe against the flags as she frowned down at the passive figure. Salome was clad in the barbaric splendor of a woman of Shushan. Jewels glittered in the torchlight on her gilded sandals, on her gold breast-plates and the slender chains that held them in place. Gold anklets clashed as she moved, jeweled bracelets weighted her bare arms. Her tall coiffure was that of a Shemitish woman, and jade pendants hung from gold hoops in her ears, flashing and sparkling with each impatient movement of her haughty head. A gem-crusted girdle supported a silk skirt so transparent that it was in the nature of a cynical mockery of convention.

Suspended from her shoulders and

trailing down her back hung a darkly scarlet cloak, and this was thrown carelessly over the crook of one arm and the bundle that arm supported.

Salome stooped suddenly and with her free hand grasped her sister's disheveled hair and forced back the girl's head to stare into her eyes. Taramis met that tigerish glare without flinching.

"You are not so ready with your tears as formerly, sweet sister," muttered the witch-girl.

"You shall wring no more tears from me," answered Taramis. "Too often you have reveled in the spectacle of the queen of Khauran sobbing for mercy on her knees. I know that you have spared me only to torment me; that is why you have limited your tortures to such torments as neither slay nor permanently disfigure. But I fear you no longer; you have strained out the last vestige of hope, fright and shame from me. Slay me and be done with it, for I have shed my last tear for your enjoyment, you she-devil from hell!"

"You flatter yourself, my dear sister," purred Salome. "So far it is only your handsome body that I have caused to suffer, only your pride and self-esteem that I have crushed. You forget that, unlike myself, you are capable of mental torment. I have observed this when I have regaled you with narratives concerning the comedies I have enacted with some of your stupid subjects. But this time I have brought more vivid proof of these farces. Did you know that Krallides, your faithful councillor, had come skulking back from Turan and been captured?"

Taramis turned pale.

"What—what have you done to him?"

For answer Salome drew the mysterious bundle from under her cloak. She shook off the silken swathings and held it up—the head of a young man, the features frozen in a convulsion as if death had come in the midst of inhuman agony.

Taramis cried out as if a blade had pierced her heart.

"Oh, Ishtar! Krallides!"

"Aye! He was seeking to stir up the people against me, poor fool, telling them that Conan spoke the truth when he said I was not Taramis. How would the people rise against the Falcon's Shemites? With sticks and pebbles? Bah! Dogs are eating his headless body in the marketplace, and this foul carrion shall be cast into the sewer to rot.

"How, sister!" She paused, smiling down at her victim. "Have you discovered that you still have unshed tears? Good! I reserved the mental torment for the last. Hereafter I shall show you many such sights as—this!"

Standing there in the torchlight with the severed head in her hand she did not look like anything ever born by a human woman, in spite of her awful beauty. Taramis did not look up. She lay face down on the slimy floor, her slim body shaken in sobs of agony, beating her clenched hands against the stones. Salome sauntered toward the door, her anklets clashing at each step, her ear-pendants winking in the torch-glare.

A few moments later she emerged from a door under a sullen arch that let into a court which in turn opened upon a winding alley. A man standing there turned toward her—a giant Shemite, with somber eyes and shoulders like a bull, his great black beard falling over his mighty, silver-mailed breast.

"She wept?" His rumble was like that of a bull, deep, low-pitched and stormy. He was the general of the mercenaries, one of the few even of Constantius' associates who knew the secret of the queens of Khauran.

"Aye, Khumbanigash. There are whole

sections of her sensibilities that I have not touched. When one sense is dulled by continual laceration, I will discover a newer, more poignant pang. — Here, dog!" A trembling, shambling figure in rags, filth and matted hair approached, one of the beggars that slept in the alleys and open courts. Salome tossed the head to him. "Here, deaf one; cast that in the nearest sewer.—Make the sign with your hands, Khumbanigash. He can not hear."

The general complied, and the tousled head bobbed, as the man turned painfully away.

"Why do you keep up this farce?" rumbled Khumbanigash. "You are so firmly established on the throne that nothing can unseat you. What if the Khaurani fools learn the truth? They can do nothing. Proclaim yourself in your true identity! Show them their beloved ex-queen—and cut off her head in the public square!"

"Not yet, good Khumbanigash——"

The arched door slammed on the hard accents of Salome, the stormy reverberations of Khumbanigash. The mute beggar crouched in the courtyard, and there was none to see that the hands which held the severed head were quivering strongly—brown, sinewy hands, strangely incongruous with the bent body and filthy tatters.

"I knew it!" It was a fierce, vibrant whisper, scarcely audible. "She lives! Oh, Krallides, your martyrdom was not in vain! They have her locked in that dungeon! Oh, Ishtar, if you love true men, aid me now!"

4. *Wolves of the Desert*

OLGERD VLADISLAV filled his jeweled goblet with crimson wine from a golden jug and thrust the vessel across the ebony table to Conan the Cimmerian. Olgerd's apparel would have satisfied the vanity of any Zaporoskan hetman.

His *khalat* was of white silk, with pearls sewn on the bosom. Girdled at the waist with a Bakhauriot belt, its skirts were drawn back to reveal his wide silken breeches, tucked into short boots of soft green leather, adorned with gold thread. On his head was a green silk turban, wound about a spired helmet chased with gold. His only weapon was a broad curved Cherkees knife in an ivory sheath girdled high on his left hip, *kozak* fashion. Throwing himself back in his gilded chair with its carven eagles, Olgerd spread his booted legs before him, and gulped down the sparkling wine noisily.

To his splendor the huge Cimmerian opposite him offered a strong contrast, with his square-cut black mane, brown scarred countenance and burning blue eyes. He was clad in black mesh-mail, and the only glitter about him was the broad gold buckle of the belt which supported his sword in its worn leather scabbard.

They were alone in the silk-walled tent, which was hung with gilt-worked tapestries and littered with rich carpets and velvet cushions, the loot of the caravans. From outside came a low, incessant murmur, the sound that always accompanies a great throng of men, in camp or otherwise. An occasional gust of desert wind rattled the palm-leaves.

"Today in the shadow, tomorrow in the sun," quoth Olgerd, loosening his crimson girdle a trifle and reaching again for the wine-jug. "That's the way of life. Once I was a hetman on the Zaporoska; now I'm a desert chief. Seven months ago you were hanging on a cross outside Khauran. Now you're lieutenant to the most powerful raider between Turan and the western meadows. You should be thankful to me!"

"For recognizing my usefulness?" Conan laughed and lifted the jug. "When you allow the elevation of a man, one can be sure that you'll profit by his advancement. I've earned everything I've won, with my blood and sweat." He glanced at the scars on the insides of his palms. There were scars, too, on his body, scars that had not been there seven months ago.

"You fight like a regiment of devils," conceded Olgerd. "But don't get to thinking that you've had anything to do with the recruits who've swarmed in to join us. It was our success at raiding, guided by my wit, that brought them in. These nomads are always looking for a successful leader to follow, and they have more faith in a foreigner than in one of their own race.

"There's no limit to what we may accomplish! We have eleven thousand men now. In another year we may have three times that number. We've contented ourselves, so far, with raids on the Turanian outposts and the city-states to the west. With thirty or forty thouand men we'll raid no longer. We'll invade and conquer and establish ourselves as rulers. I'll be emperor of all Shem yet, and you'll be my vizier, so long as you carry out my orders unquestioningly. In the meantime, I think we'll ride eastward and storm that Turanian outpost at Vezek, where the caravans pay toll."

Conan shook his head. "I think not."

Olgerd glared, his quick temper irritated.

"What do you mean, *you* think not? *I* do the thinking for this army!"

"There are enough men in this band now for my purpose," answered the Cimmerian. "I'm sick of waiting. I have a score to settle."

"Oh!" Olgerd scowled, and gulped wine, then grinned. "Still thinking of that cross, eh? Well, I like a good hater. But that can wait."

"You told me once you'd aid me in taking Khauran," said Conan.

"Yes, but that was before I began to see the full possibilities of our power," answered Olgerd. "I was only thinking of the loot in the city. I don't want to waste our strength unprofitably. Khauran is too strong a nut for us to crack now. Maybe in a year——"

"Within the week," answered Conan, and the *kozak* stared at the certainty in his voice.

"Listen," said Olgerd, "even if I were willing to throw away men on such a hare-brained attempt—what could you expect? Do you think these wolves could besiege and take a city like Khauran?"

"There'll be no siege," answered the Cimmerian. "I know how to draw Constantius out into the plain."

"And what then?" cried Olgerd with an oath. "In the arrow-play our horsemen would have the worst of it, for the armor of the *asshuri* is the better, and when it came to sword-strokes their close-marshaled ranks of trained swordsmen would cleave through our loose lines and scatter our men like chaff before the wind."

"Not if there were three thousand desperate Hyborian horsemen fighting in a solid wedge such as I could teach them," answered Conan.

"And where would you secure three thousand Hyborians?" asked Olgerd with vast sarcasm. "Will you conjure them out of the air?"

"I *have* them," answered the Cimmerian imperturbably. "Three thousand men of Khauran camp at the oasis of Akrel awaiting my orders."

"*What?*" Olgerd glared like a startled wolf.

"Aye. Men who had fled from the

tyranny of Constantius. Most of them have been living the lives of outlaws in the deserts east of Khauran, and are gaunt and hard and desperate as man-eating tigers. One of them will be a match for any three squat mercenaries. It takes oppression and hardship to stiffen men's guts and put the fire of hell into their thews. They were broken up into small bands; all they needed was a leader. They believed the word I sent them by my riders, and assembled at the oasis and put themselves at my disposal."

"All this without my knowledge?" A feral light began to gleam in Olgerd's eyes. He hitched at his weapon-girdle.

"It was *I* they wished to follow, not *you*."

"And what did you tell these outcasts to gain their allegiance?" There was a dangerous ring in Olgerd's voice.

"I told them that I'd use this horde of desert wolves to help them destroy Constantius and give Khauran back into the hands of its citizens."

"You fool!" whispered Olgerd. "Do you deem yourself chief already?"

The men were on their feet, facing each other across the ebony board, devil-lights dancing in Olgerd's cold gray eyes, a grim smile on the Cimmerian's hard lips.

"I'll have you torn between four palm-trees," said the *kozak* calmly.

"Call the men and bid them do it!" challenged Conan. "See if they obey you!"

BARING his teeth in a snarl, Olgerd lifted his hand—then paused. There was something about the confidence in the Cimmerian's dark face that shook him. His eyes began to burn like those of a wolf.

"You scum of the western hills," he muttered, "have you dared seek to undermine my power?"

"I didn't have to," answered Conan. "You lied when you said I had nothing to do with bringing in the new recruits. I had everything to do with it. They took your orders, but they fought for me. There is not room for two chiefs of the Zuagirs. They know I am the stronger man. I understand them better than you, and they, me; because I am a barbarian too."

"And what will they say when you ask them to fight for the Khaurani?" asked Olgerd sardonically.

"They'll follow me. I'll promise them a camel-train of gold from the palace. Khauran will be willing to pay that as a guerdon for getting rid of Constantius. After that, I'll lead them against the Turanians as you have planned. They want loot, and they'd as soon fight Constantius for it as anybody."

In Olgerd's eyes grew a recognition of defeat. In his red dreams of empire he had missed what was going on about him. Happenings and events that had seemed meaningless before now flashed into his mind, with their true significance, bringing a realization that Conan spoke no idle boast. The giant black-mailed figure before him was the real chief of the Zuagirs.

"Not if you die!" muttered Olgerd, and his hand flickered toward his hilt. But quick as the stroke of a great cat Conan's arm shot across the table and his fingers locked on Olgerd's forearm. There was a snap of breaking bones, and for a tense instant the scene held: the men facing each other as motionless as images, perspiration starting out on Olgerd's forehead. Conan laughed, never easing his grip on the broken arm.

"Are you fit to live, Olgerd?"

His smile did not alter as the corded muscles rippled in knotting ridges along his forearm and his fingers ground into

the *kozak's* quivering flesh. There was the sound of broken bones grating together and Olgerd's face turned the color of ashes; blood oozed from his lip where his teeth sank, but he uttered no sound.

With a laugh Conan released him and drew back, and the *kozak* swayed, caught the table edge with his good hand to steady himself.

"I give you life, Olgerd, as you gave it to me," said Conan tranquilly, "though it was for your own ends that you took me down from the cross. It was a bitter test you gave me then; you couldn't have endured it; neither could anyone, but a western barbarian.

"Take your horse and go. It's tied behind the tent, and food and water are in the saddle-bags. None will see your going, but go quickly. There's no room for a fallen chief on the desert. If the warriors see you, maimed and deposed, they'll never let you leave the camp alive."

Olgerd did not reply. Slowly, without a word, he turned and stalked across the tent, through the flapped opening. Unspeaking he climbed into the saddle of the great white stallion that stood tethered there in the shade of a spreading palm-tree; and unspeaking, with his broken arm thrust in the bosom of his *khalat,* he reined the steed about and rode eastward into the open desert, out of the life of the people of the Zuagir.

Inside the tent Conan emptied the wine-jug and smacked his lips with relish. Tossing the empty vessel into a corner, he braced his belt and strode out through the front opening, halting for a moment to let his gaze sweep over the lines of camel-hair tents that stretched before him, and the white-robed figures that moved among them, arguing, singing, mending bridles or whetting tulwars.

He lifted his voice in a thunder that carried to the farthest confines of the encampment: "*Aie,* you dogs, sharpen your ears and listen! Gather around here. I have a tale to tell you."

5. *The Voice From the Crystal*

IN A chamber in a tower near the city wall a group of men listened attentively to the words of one of their number. They were young men, but hard and sinewy, with the bearing that comes only to men rendered desperate by adversity. They were clad in mail shirts and worn leather; swords hung at their girdles.

"I knew that Conan spoke the truth when he said it was not Taramis!" the speaker exclaimed. "For months I have haunted the outskirts of the palace, playing the part of a deaf beggar. At last I learned what I had believed—that our queen was a prisoner in the dungeons that adjoin the palace. I watched my opportunity and captured a Shemitish jailer—knocked him senseless as he left the courtyard late one night—dragged him into a cellar near by and questioned him. Before he died he told me what I have just told you, and what we have suspected all along—that the woman ruling Khauran is a witch: Salome. Taramis, he said, is imprisoned in the lowest dungeon.

"This invasion of the Zuagirs gives us the opportunity we sought. What Conan means to do, I can not say. Perhaps he merely wishes vengeance on Constantius. Perhaps he intends sacking the city and destroying it. He is a barbarian and no one can understand their minds.

"But this is what we must do: rescue Taramis while the battle rages! Constantius will march out into the plain to give battle. Even now his men are mounting. He will do this because there is not sufficient food in the city to stand a siege. Conan burst out of the desert so suddenly that there was no time to bring in sup-

plies. And the Cimmerian is equipped for a siege. Scouts have reported that the Zuagirs have siege engines, built, undoubtedly, according to the instructions of Conan, who learned all the arts of war among the Western nations.

"Constantius does not desire a long siege; so he will march with his warriors into the plain, where he expects to scatter Conan's forces at one stroke. He will leave only a few hundred men in the city, and they will be on the walls and in the towers commanding the gates.

"The prison will be left all but unguarded. When we have freed Taramis our next actions will depend upon circumstances. If Conan wins, we must show Taramis to the people and bid them rise—they will! Oh, they will! With their bare hands they are enough to overpower the Shemites left in the city and close the gates against both the mercenaries and the nomads. Neither must get within the walls! Then we will parley with Conan. He was always loyal to Taramis. If he knows the truth, and she appeals to him, I believe he will spare the city. If, which is more probable, Constantius prevails, and Conan is routed, we must steal out of the city with the queen and seek safety in flight.

"Is all clear?"

They replied with one voice.

"Then let us loosen our blades in our scabbards, commend our souls to Ishtar, and start for the prison, for the mercenaries are already marching through the southern gate."

This was true. The dawnlight glinted on peaked helmets pouring in a steady stream through the broad arch, on the bright housings of the chargers. This would be a battle of horsemen, such as is possible only in the lands of the East. The riders flowed through the gates like a river of steel—somber figures in black and silver mail, with their curled beards and hooked noses, and their inexorable eyes in which glimmered the fatality of their race—the utter lack of doubt or of mercy.

The streets and the walls were lined with throngs of people who watched silently these warriors of an alien race riding forth to defend their native city. There was no sound; dully, expressionless they watched, those gaunt people in shabby garments, their caps in their hands.

IN A tower that overlooked the broad street that led to the southern gate, Salome lolled on a velvet couch cynically watching Constantius as he settled his broad sword-belt about his lean hips and drew on his gauntlets. They were alone in the chamber. Outside, the rhythmical clank of harness and shuffle of horses' hoofs welled up through the gold-barred casements.

"Before nightfall," quoth Constantius, giving a twirl to his thin mustache, "you'll have some captives to feed to your temple-devil. Does it not grow weary of soft, city-bred flesh? Perhaps it would relish the harder thews of a desert man."

"Take care you do not fall prey to a fiercer beast than Thaug," warned the girl. "Do not forget who it is that leads these desert animals."

"I am not likely to forget," he answered. "That is one reason why I am advancing to meet him. The dog has fought in the West and knows the art of siege. My scouts had some trouble in approaching his columns, for his outriders have eyes like hawks; but they did get close enough to see the engines he is dragging on ox-cart wheels drawn by camels—catapults, rams, ballistas, mangonels—by Ishtar! he must have had ten thousand men working day and night for a month. Where he got the material for

their construction is more than I can understand. Perhaps he has a treaty with the Turanians, and gets supplies from them.

"Anyway, they won't do him any good. I've fought these desert wolves before—an exchange of arrows for awhile, in which the armor of my warriors protects them—then a charge and my squadrons sweep through the loose swarms of the nomads, wheel and sweep back through, scattering them to the four winds. I'll ride back through the south gate before sunset, with hundreds of naked captives staggering at my horse's tail. We'll hold a fête tonight, in the great square. My soldiers delight in flaying their enemies alive—we will have a wholesale skinning, and make these weak-kneed townsfolk watch. As for Conan, it will afford me intense pleasure, if we take him alive, to impale him on the palace steps."

"Skin as many as you like," answered Salome indifferently. "I would like a dress made of human hide. But at least a hundred captives you must give to me—for the altar, and for Thaug."

"It shall be done," answered Constantius, with his gauntleted hand brushing back the thin hair from his high bald forehead, burned dark by the sun. "For victory and the fair honor of Taramis!" he said sardonically, and, taking his vizored helmet under his arm, he lifted a hand in salute, and strode clanking from the chamber. His voice drifted back, harshly lifted in orders to his officers.

Salome leaned back on the couch, yawned, stretched herself like a great supple cat, and called: "Zang!"

A cat-footed priest, with features like yellowed parchment stretched over a skull, entered noiselessly.

Salome turned to an ivory pedestal on which stood two crystal globes, and taking from it the smaller, she handed the glistening sphere to the priest.

"Ride with Constantius," she said. "Give me the news of the battle. Go!"

The skull-faced man bowed low, and hiding the globe under his dark mantle, hurried from the chamber.

Outside in the city there was no sound, except the clank of hoofs and after a while the clang of a closing gate. Salome mounted a wide marble stair that led to the flat, canopied, marble-battlemented roof. She was above all other buildings of the city. The streets were deserted, the great square in front of the palace was empty. In normal times folk shunned the grim temple which rose on the opposite side of that square, but now the town looked like a dead city. Only on the southern wall and the roofs that overlooked it was there any sign of life. There the people massed thickly. They made no demonstration, did not know whether to hope for the victory or defeat of Constantius. Victory meant further misery under his intolerable rule; defeat probably meant the sack of the city and red massacre. No word had come from Conan. They did not know what to expect at his hands. They remembered that he was a barbarian.

THE squadrons of the mercenaries were moving out into the plain. In the distance, just this side of the river, other dark masses were moving, barely recognizable as men on horses. Objects dotted the farther bank; Conan had not brought his siege engines across the river, apparently fearing an attack in the midst of the crossing. But he had crossed with his full force of horsemen. The sun rose and struck glints of fire from the dark multitudes. The squadrons from the city broke into a gallop; a deep roar reached the ears of the people on the wall.

The rolling masses merged, intermingled; at that distance it was a tangled confusion in which no details stood out. Charge and countercharge were not to be identified. Clouds of dust rose from the plains, under the stamping hoofs, veiling the action. Through these swirling clouds masses of riders loomed, appearing and disappearing, and spears flashed.

Salome shrugged her shoulders and descended the stair. The palace lay silent. All the slaves were on the wall, gazing vainly southward with the citizens.

She entered the chamber where she had talked with Constantius, and approached the pedestal, noting that the crystal globe was clouded, shot with bloody streaks of crimson. She bent over the ball, swearing under her breath.

"Zang!" she called. "Zang!"

Mists swirled in the sphere, resolving themselves into billowing dust-clouds through which black figures rushed unrecognizably; steel glinted like lightning in the murk. Then the face of Zang leaped into startling distinctness; it was as if the wide eyes gazed up at Salome. Blood trickled from a gash in the skull-like head, the skin was gray with sweat-runneled dust. The lips parted, writhing; to other ears than Salome's it would have seemed that the face in the crystal contorted silently. But sound to her came as plainly from those ashen lips as if the priest had been in the same room with her, instead of miles away, shouting into the smaller crystal. Only the gods of darkness knew what unseen, magic filaments linked together those shimmering spheres.

"Salome!" shrieked the bloody head. *"Salome!"*

"I hear!" she cried. "Speak! How goes the battle?"

"Doom is upon us!" screamed the skull-like apparition. "Khauran is lost! *Aie,* my horse is down and I can not win clear! Men are falling around me! They are dying like flies, in their silvered mail!"

"Stop yammering and tell me what happened!" she cried harshly.

"We rode at the desert-dogs and they came on to meet us!" yowled the priest. "Arrows flew in clouds between the hosts, and the nomads wavered. Constantius ordered the charge. In even ranks we thundered upon them.

"Then the masses of their horde opened to right and left, and through the cleft rushed three thousand Hyborian horsemen whose presence we had not even suspected. Men of Khauran, mad with hate! Big men in full armor on massive horses! In a solid wedge of steel they smote us like a thunderbolt. They split our ranks asunder before we knew what was upon us, and then the desert-men swarmed on us from either flank.

"They have ripped our ranks apart, broken and scattered us! It is a trick of that devil Conan! The siege engines are false—mere frames of palm trunks and painted silk, that fooled our scouts who saw them from afar. A trick to draw us out to our doom! Our warriors flee! Khumbanigash is down—Conan slew him. I do not see Constantius. The Khaurani rage through our milling masses like blood-mad lions, and the desert-men feather us with arrows. I—ahhh!"

There was a flicker as of lightning, or trenchant steel, a burst of bright blood —then abruptly the image vanished, like a bursting bubble, and Salome was staring into an empty crystal ball that mirrored only her own furious features.

She stood perfectly still for a few moments, erect and staring into space. Then she clapped her hands and another skull-like priest entered, as silent and immobile as the first.

"Constantius is beaten," she said swiftly. "We are doomed. Conan will be

crashing at our gates within the hour. If he catches me, I have no illusions as to what I can expect. But first I am going to make sure that my cursed sister never ascends the throne again. Follow me! Come what may, we shall give Thaug a feast."

As she descended the stairs and galleries of the palace, she heard a faint rising echo from the distant walls. The people there had begun to realize that the battle was going against Constantius. Through the dust clouds masses of horsemen were visible, racing toward the city.

Palace and prison were connected by a long closed gallery, whose vaulted roof rose on gloomy arches. Hurrying along this, the false queen and her slave passed through a heavy door at the other end that let them into the dim-lit recesses of the prison. They had emerged into a wide, arched corridor at a point near where a stone stair descended into the darkness. Salome recoiled suddenly, swearing. In the gloom of the hall lay a motionless form—a Shemitish jailer, his short beard tilted toward the roof as his head hung on a half-severed neck. As panting voices from below reached the girl's ears, she shrank back into the black shadow of an arch, pushing the priest behind her, her hand groping in her girdle.

6. *The Vulture's Wings*

It was the smoky light of a torch which roused Taramis, queen of Khauran, from the slumber in which she sought forgetfulness. Lifting herself on her hand she raked back her tangled hair and blinked up, expecting to meet the mocking countenance of Salome, malign with new torments. Instead a cry of pity and horror reached her ears.

"Taramis! Oh, my queen!"

The sound was so strange to her ears that she thought she was still dreaming. Behind the torch she could make out figures now, the glint of steel, then five countenances bent toward her, not swarthy and hook-nosed, but lean, aquiline faces, browned by the sun. She crouched in her tatters, staring wildly.

One of the figures sprang forward and fell on one knee before her, arms stretched appealingly toward her.

"Oh, Taramis! Thank Ishtar we have found you! Do you not remember me, Valerius? Once with your own lips you praised me, after the battle of Korveka!"

"Valerius!" she stammered. Suddenly tears welled into her eyes. "Oh, I dream! It is some magic of Salome's, to torment me!"

"No!" The cry rang with exultation. "It is your own true vassals come to rescue you! Yet we must hasten. Constantius fights in the plain against Conan, who has brought the Zuagirs across the river, but three hundred Shemites yet hold the city. We slew the jailer and took his keys, and have seen no other guards. But we must be gone. Come!"

The queen's legs gave way, not from weakness but from the reaction. Valerius lifted her like a child, and with the torchbearer hurrying before them, they left the dungeon and went up a slimy stone stair. It seemed to mount endlessly, but presently they emerged into a corridor.

They were passing a dark arch when the torch was suddenly struck out, and the bearer cried out in fierce, brief agony. A burst of blue fire glared in the dark corridor, in which the furious face of Salome was limned momentarily, with a beast-like figure crouching beside her—then the eyes of the watchers were blinded by that blaze.

Valerius tried to stagger along the corridor with the queen; dazedly he heard the sound of murderous blows driven deep

in flesh, accompanied by gasps of death and a bestial grunting. Then the queen was torn brutally from his arms, and a savage blow on his helmet dashed him to the floor.

Grimly he crawled to his feet, shaking his head in an effort to rid himself of the blue flame which seemed still to dance devilishly before him. When his blinded sight cleared, he found himself alone in the corridor—alone except for the dead. His four companions lay in their blood, heads and bosoms cleft and gashed. Blinded and dazed in that hell-born glare, they had died without an opportunity of defending themselves. The queen was gone.

With a bitter curse Valerius caught up his sword, tearing his cleft helmet from his head to clatter on the flags; blood ran down his cheek from a cut in his scalp.

Reeling, frantic with indecision, he heard a voice calling his name in desperate urgency: "Valerius! *Valerius!*"

He staggered in the direction of the voice, and rounded a corner just in time to have his arms filled with a soft, supple figure which flung itself frantically at him.

"Ivga! Are you mad!"

"I had to come!" she sobbed. "I followed you—hid in an arch of the outer court. A moment ago I saw *her* emerge with a brute who carried a woman in his arms. I knew it was Taramis, and that you had failed! Oh, you are hurt!"

"A scratch!" He put aside her clinging hands. "Quick, Ivga, tell me which way they went!"

"They fled across the square toward the temple."

He paled. "Ishtar! Oh, the fiend! She means to give Taramis to the devil she worships! Quick, Ivga! Run to the south wall where the people watch the battle! Tell them that their real queen has been found—that the impostor has dragged her to the temple! Go!"

Sobbing, the girl sped away, her light sandals pattering on the cobblestones, and Valerius raced across the court, plunged into the street, dashed into the square upon which it debouched, and raced for the great structure that rose on the opposite side.

His flying feet spurned the marble as he darted up the broad stair and through the pillared portico. Evidently their prisoner had given them some trouble. Taramis, sensing the doom intended for her, was fighting against it with all the strength of her splendid young body. Once she had broken away from the brutish priest, only to be dragged down again.

The group was half-way down the broad nave, at the other end of which stood the grim altar and beyond that the great metal door, obscenely carven, through which many had gone, but from which only Salome had ever emerged. Taramis' breath came in panting gasps; her tattered garment had been torn from her in the struggle. She writhed in the grasp of her apish captor like a white, naked nymph in the arms of a satyr. Salome watched cynically, though impatiently, moving toward the carven door, and from the dusk that lurked along the lofty walls the obscene gods and gargoyles leered down, as if imbued with salacious life.

Choking with fury, Valerius rushed down the great hall, sword in hand. At a sharp cry from Salome, the skull-faced priest looked up, then released Taramis, drew a heavy knife, already smeared with blood, and ran at the oncoming Khaurani.

But cutting down men blinded by the devil's-flame loosed by Salome was different from fighting a wiry young Hyborian afire with hate and rage.

Up went the dripping knife, but before it could fall Valerius' keen narrow blade slashed through the air, and the

fist that held the knife jumped from its wrist in a shower of blood. Valerius, berserk, slashed again and yet again before the crumpling figure could fall. The blade licked through flesh and bone. The skull-like head fell one way, the half-sundered torso the other.

Valerius whirled on his toes, quick and fierce as a jungle-cat, glaring about for Salome. She must have exhausted her fire-dust in the prison. She was bending over Taramis, grasping her sister's black locks in one hand, in the other lifting a dagger. Then with a fierce cry Valerius' sword was sheathed in her breast with such fury that the point sprang out between her shoulders. With an awful shriek the witch sank down, writhing in convulsions, grasping at the naked blade as it was withdrawn, smoking and dripping. Her eyes were unhuman; with a more than human vitality she clung to the life that ebbed through the wound that split the crimson crescent on her ivory bosom. She groveled on the floor, clawing and biting at the naked stones in her agony.

Sickened at the sight, Valerius stooped and lifted the half-fainting queen. Turning his back on the twisting figure upon the floor, he ran toward the door, stumbling in his haste. He staggered out upon the portico, halted at the head of the steps. The square thronged with people. Some had come at Ivga's incoherent cries; others had deserted the walls in fear of the onsweeping hordes out of the desert, fleeing unreasoningly toward the center of the city. Dumb resignation had vanished. The throng seethed and milled, yelling and screaming. About the road there sounded somewhere the splintering of stone and timbers.

A band of grim Shemites cleft the crowd—the guards of the northern gates, hurrying toward the south gate to reinforce their comrades there. They reined up short at sight of the youth on the steps, holding the limp, naked figure in his arms. The heads of the throng turned toward the temple; the crowd gaped, a new bewilderment added to their swirling confusion.

"Here is your queen!" yelled Valerius, straining to make himself understood above the clamor. The people gave back a bewildered roar. They did not understand, and Valerius sought in vain to lift his voice above their bedlam. The Shemites rode toward the temple steps, beating a way through the crowd with their spears.

Then a new, grisly element introduced itself into the frenzy. Out of the gloom of the temple behind Valerius wavered a slim white figure, laced with crimson. The people screamed; there in the arms of Valerius hung the woman they thought their queen; yet there in the temple door staggered another figure, like a reflection of the other. Their brains reeled. Valerius felt his blood congeal as he stared at the swaying witch-girl. His sword had transfixed her, sundered her heart. She should be dead; by all laws of nature she should be dead. Yet there she swayed, on her feet, clinging horribly to life.

"Thaug!" she screamed, reeling in the doorway. *"Thaug!"* As in answer to that frightful invocation there boomed a thunderous croaking from within the temple, the snapping of wood and metal.

"That is the queen!" roared the captain of the Shemites, lifting his bow. "Shoot down the man and the other woman!"

But the roar of a roused hunting-pack rose from the people; they had guessed the truth at last, understood Valerius' frenzied appeals, knew that the girl who hung limply in his arms was their true queen. With a soul-shaking yell they surged on the Shemites, tearing and smiting with tooth and nail and naked hands, with the desperation of hard-pent fury

loosed at last. Above them Salome swayed and tumbled down the marble stair, dead at last.

Arrows flickered about him as Valerius ran back between the pillars of the portico, shielding the body of the queen with his own. Shooting and slashing ruthlessly the mounted Shemites were holding their own with the maddened crowd. Valerius darted to the temple door —with one foot on the threshold he recoiled, crying out in horror and despair.

Out of the gloom at the other end of the great hall a vast dark form heaved up —came rushing toward him in gigantic frog-like hops. He saw the gleam of great unearthly eyes, the shimmer of fangs or talons. He fell back from the door, and then the whir of a shaft past his ear warned him that death was also behind him. He wheeled desperately. Four or five Shemites had cut their way through the throng and were spurring their horses up the steps, their bows lifted to shoot him down. He sprang behind a pillar, on which the arrows splintered. Taramis had fainted. She hung like a dead woman in his arms.

Before the Shemites could loose again, the doorway was blocked by a gigantic shape. With affrighted yells the mercenaries wheeled and began beating a frantic way through the throng, which crushed back in sudden, galvanized horror, trampling one another in their stampede.

But the monster seemed to be watching Valerius and the girl. Squeezing its vast, unstable bulk through the door, it bounded toward him, as he ran down the steps. He felt it looming behind him, a giant shadowy thing, like a travesty of nature cut out of the heart of night, a black shapelessness in which only the staring eyes and gleaming fangs were distinct.

There came a sudden thunder of hoofs; a rout of Shemites, bloody and battered, streamed across the square from the south, plowing blindly through the packed throng. Behind them swept a horde of horsemen yelling in a familiar tongue, waving red swords—the exiles, returned! With them rode fifty black-bearded desert-riders, and at their head a giant figure in black mail.

"Conan!" shrieked Valerius. *"Conan!"*

The giant yelled a command. Without checking their headlong pace, the desert men lifted their bows, drew and loosed. A cloud of arrows sang across the square, over the seething heads of the multitudes, and sank feather-deep in the black monster. It halted, wavered, reared, a black blot against the marble pillars. Again the sharp cloud sang, and yet again, and the horror collapsed and rolled down the steps, as dead as the witch who had summoned it out of the night of ages.

Conan drew rein beside the portico, leaped off. Valerius had laid the queen on the marble, sinking beside her in utter exhaustion. The people surged about, crowding in. The Cimmerian cursed them back, lifted her dark head, pillowed it against his mailed shoulder.

"By Crom, what is this? The real Taramis! But who is that yonder?"

"The demon who wore her shape," panted Valerius.

Conan swore heartily. Ripping a cloak from the shoulders of a soldier, he wrapped it about the naked queen. Her long dark lashes quivered on her cheeks; her eyes opened, stared up unbelievingly into the Cimmerian's scarred face.

"Conan!" Her soft fingers caught at him. "Do I dream? *She* told me you were dead——"

"Scarcely!" He grinned hardly. "You do not dream. You are queen of Khauran

again. I broke Constantius, out there by the river. Most of his dogs never lived to reach the walls, for I gave orders that no prisoners be taken—except Constantius. The city guard closed the gate in our faces, but we burst it in with rams swung from our saddles. I left all my wolves outside, except this fifty. I didn't trust them in here, and these Khaurani lads were enough for the gate guards."

"It has been a nightmare!" she whimpered. "Oh, my poor people! You must help me try to repay them for all they have suffered, Conan, henceforth councilor as well as captain!"

Conan laughed, but shook his head. Rising, he set the queen upon her feet, and beckoned to a number of his Khaurani horsemen who had not continued the pursuit of the fleeing Shemites. They sprang from their horses, eager to do the bidding of their new-found queen.

"No, lass, that's over with. I'm chief of the Zuagirs now, and must lead them to plunder the Turanians, as I promised. This lad, Valerius, will make you a better captain than I. I wasn't made to dwell among marble walls, anyway. But I must leave you now, and complete what I've begun. Shemites still live in Khauran."

As Valerius started to follow Taramis across the square toward the palace, through a lane opened by the wildly cheering multitude, he felt a soft hand slipped timidly into his sinewy fingers and turned to receive the slender body of Ivga in his arms. He crushed her to him and drank her kisses with the gratitude of a weary fighter who has attained rest at last through tribulation and storm.

But not all men seek rest and peace; some are born with the spirit of the storm in their blood, restless harbingers of violence and bloodshed, knowing no other path. . . .

THE sun was rising. The ancient caravan road was thronged with white-robed horsemen, in a wavering line that stretched from the walls of Khauran to a spot far out in the plain. Conan the Cimmerian sat at the head of that column, near the jagged end of a wooden beam that stuck up out of the ground. Near that stump rose a heavy cross, and on that cross a man hung by spikes through his hands and feet.

"Seven months ago, Constantius," said Conan, "it was I who hung there, and you who sat here."

Constantius did not reply; he licked his gray lips and his eyes were glassy with pain and fear. Muscles writhed like cords along his lean body.

"You are more fit to inflict torture than to endure it," said Conan tranquilly. "I hung there on a cross as you are hanging, and I lived, thanks to circumstances and a stamina peculiar to barbarians. But you civilized men are soft; your lives are not nailed to your spines as are ours. Your fortitude consists mainly in inflicting torment, not in enduring it. You will be dead before sundown. And so, Falcon of the desert, I leave you to the companionship of another bird of the desert."

He gestured toward the vultures whose shadows swept across the sands as they wheeled overhead. From the lips of Constantius came an inhuman cry of despair and horror.

Conan lifted his reins and rode toward the river that shone like silver in the morning sun. Behind him the white-clad riders struck into a trot; the gaze of each, as he passed a certain spot, turned impersonally and with the desert man's lack of compassion, toward the cross and the gaunt figure that hung there, black against the sunrise. Their horses' hoofs beat out a knell in the dust. Lower and lower swept the wings of the hungry vultures.

"They cocked their heads to watch her."

The Vengeance of Ti Fong

By BASSETT MORGAN

A thrilling, fascinating tale of great apes and the weird genius of a Chinese scientist who had mastered too many of Nature's laws

WHEN a native messenger arrived at the camp carrying a letter in the cleft of a notched stick, Jornado opened it and tossed the envelope to Captain Daunt. On the flap was a heraldic device denoting an ancient lineage. Jornado read the letter and passed it also to Daunt.

"Herr Lemft wants us to visit him, Daunt. It might be worth while. His letter sounds as if he has had about enough of the Sumatra highland country for his own good. Only a religious zealot can play hermit in the tropics without breaking down, and he isn't that type. Even the half-caste girl I saw in his house on my last visit seems to have lost her power to keep up his spirits."

Piet Jornado and Captain Daunt had combined their resources in a partnership for shipping tropic birds and animals to far distant museums and zoological gardens and they were hunting saladang in Sumatra with indifferent success. Three natives had been killed by the ferocious beasts without a single capture.

"Perhaps a change will break our run of hard luck," agreed Daunt, and a few hours later they were navigating tortuous hill roads leading to the comfortable bungalow set deep in a well-kept garden of native flowering shrubs, overlooking a valley where thatched huts of a village surrounded an ornate temple with gaudy ornamentation and roof timbers curved like the horns of a carabao.

"Welcome, my fellow countryman," cried Lemft to Jornado. "Welcome, Captain Daunt. I was overjoyed to see your car coming, and I can promise you cool schnapps dear to a Dutchman's heart."

"I'm Dutch enough," admitted Jornado, "though I've never seen the Netherlands. But there is a solid business block of marble in Antwerp where my relatives rule virtually as small kings. The best I can do is take my trick of command on the schooner, and domineer over natives. But some day I hope to get an island of my own, and preside over it and the natives in the old feudal manner."

"You've got the proper figure for it," said Daunt, smiling, "though the King of the Cannibal Island business never tempted me. Perhaps Herr Lemft could give you some pointers, Jornado. You Netherlanders rule as if to the manor born." Yet he saw in Herr Lemft, who lorded it over a vast expanse of country, the signs of disintegration of a once magnificent physique, the silver in his blond hair, the sagging of face muscles under the sunburn. Beside him Jornado, equally big and well built, suggested the air of a conqueror, with ruddy hair and the mahogany tint of skin that had made Daunt try tormenting him about his ancestry:

"If some Othello of the Spanish armies that plagued Holland to its own humiliation didn't have a love affair with one of your golden-haired grandmothers, Jornado, I'll eat my shirt," he said.

"Who knows?" was the careless response. "And who cares?"

"I WAS only afraid business would prevent your coming," Herr Lemft repeated again and again as they sat imbibing imported schnapps. "How much longer I can endure the place, I do not know. The loneliness is frightful."

"But you've got a pretty place. And a pretty companion," commented Jornado. "I could be content, situated like this."

"The girl is gone. I miss her." And Lemft's hand brushed his chin. Daunt noticed it shook in the gesture. "Something happened." Lemft seized his glass abruptly and spilled the liquor, nor did he take the trouble to wipe it from his silk shirt.

Daunt covered his glass with his hand to prevent it being filled. In spite of the tropic heat, the flamboyant trees, the comforts of the bungalow, he felt the contagious perturbation of Herr Lemft.

His great bulk swayed into the chair when they were summoned to dinner and he sat staring at a dish of tropic fruits colorful as the jewel-hung trees of an Aladdin's orchard.

"You let the girl go?" asked Jornado, softly, persuasively.

"She is gone." Lemft breathed the admission; then his body jerked from the slumped inertness. "That is, I think, I *hope* she is gone. I do not know. Strange things happen in this Sumatra. I was too

severe with her. I rule natives and thought I ruled her. She was a pretty creature. But you saw her, Jornado. Half Malay, half Chinese, she was. And when she danced——" For a moment a trace of self-possession gripped him. He kissed his fingers to the walls. Then a procession of house-boys came carrying a huge bowl of steaming rice, bowls of sauces, fish, chicken, the concomitants of the rice table from which the three men helped themselves.

"I remember how she danced," said Jornado of the girl, and in his voice was a persuasive tone that had drawn many a story from Daunt's memories as they sat around a campfire. "One has to be severe sometimes," he urged.

"I blame the boy who punished her. She had treated him like dirt under her dancing feet, of course, and he used the whip too hard. I mourned her, truly I did. But I was enraged when it happened. I'd been drinking. She drove me to it. But Ti Fong—damn his soul—is taking vengeance that drives me mad. *Mad!*" he shouted, half starting from his chair. Then, remembering his guests, Lemft subsided and sat staring again at the colorful fruit.

"Look! Those remind me of her. She loved colors and I got everything for her she could ask, silks, jewels."

He rose and darted to the bedroom, returning with both hands clutching necklaces, armlets, rings and silken scarves, and threw them on the table. The gold bands rolled like little hoops and the gems tinted the white cloth in drops of green and blue and red. Daunt felt his skin prickling as Lemft stood trying to disentangle the silks from fingernails that neglect had broken.

"All I have left of her . . . those and the nightmare haunting me," he half whispered, then turned to yell: "Lights, boy! It's getting dark here. . . . She comes at dark," he said in a lowered cautious tone that made Daunt grateful for the lamps that were brought in. Even Jornado was neglecting his rice, and at the sound of something shuffling on the gravel path outside he pushed back his chair.

Lemft began to retreat from his place beside the table, backing toward the room corner with a cat-like vigilance as the shuffling sound approached and the swift dying light at the outer screen was blotted by the huge dark figure of a great ape. Daunt's eyes glanced toward Lemft and saw in his face a look of terrified pleading as the ape's fingers unfastened the screen door hasp and it advanced.

The bang of the screen door as it entered brought Daunt from his chair in a jerk. Jornado rose quietly, but he too backed away.

"Lord! A tame 'rang-tang," he said.

"Then *you*——" Lemft choked and went on, "You see her, too! I couldn't believe the servants. They clear out every night when she comes. They say she is *berhantu* . . . a ghost. But if you see her, why I——" the sound from his lips was not laughter but the hysterical chortle of mad mirth. "You'll think me silly. I have not believed she was alive, real. Her name is Maylo."

"She's real enough," Jornado said quietly. "Aren't you, Maylo?"

From the dark lips of the creature that walked upright and seemed perturbed by strangers in the room, came a sound that Daunt could have sworn was a reply to Jornado's words.

"Maylo was my girl's name." Lemft was speaking rapidly, desperately. "I got her from Ti Fong, and she was one of the temple dancers. He wouldn't sell her outright. It was better business to

charge me exorbitantly, and send for her when he put on a feast to entertain his friends. I forbade her to go to him. But she was afraid, as all men are afraid of Ti Fong, and she went. I ordered her punished, and the boy was too severe. When I woke from a drunken sleep she was gone. Ti Fong had her. . . . After a few months, this—this creature came to me, saying my name, dancing for me as Maylo used to do. You should see her. . . . Dance for them, Maylo. There are your pretties. . . . Dance."

THE ape's eyes held a piteous, dog-like affection as the long hairy arm shot out and took a scarf, winding it around her body. She was draping another length of silk around her head as Daunt saw a scar puckering the skin of the skull, encircling the entire cranium. A soft chattering came from the lips as the ape tried in vain to slip bracelets over her paws and rings on her fingers. But with a sound crooning from her lips the *danse macabre* began, steps familiar to men who know Malaysia, the lithe weaving movement of arms that seem boneless as snakes, the gliding, swaying and posturing of temple dancers like those celestial Asparsas carved on the walls of Angkor Wat. In the crooning Daunt discerned the strange monotonous tune of Malay music and a distinct tempo regulating the dance. He moved toward the corner where Jornado stood watching, but Lemft had slumped on a wall couch, staring until the whites of his eyes showed around the iris. His lips were blue, his nostrils twitching oddly.

"Stop it, Maylo," cried Daunt. "Lemft is sick. Look. . . . Better call the servants."

The dance ended abruptly, and the ape bent over the couch before Jornado or Daunt could reach Lemft.

"Dose boy go when I come," it said plainly, and Daunt's hair seemed to be rising as if lifted by a cold wind. "Dose boy do not like Maylo. But Mynherr lofes Maylo." And before they could interfere, Lemft was lifted in the ape's arms.

"Put him down, you ———" Jornado supplied a word insulting to a Malay. The schnapps, the blood of old Moors and the ghastly and incredible horror-dance had combined with dire results in him.

As if she sensed his rage and her own peril, the ape dropped Lemft like a sack and stood with eyes glaring, mouthing her rage at Jornado. A moment later the gun at his belt, for use in close quarters with big game, blazed death. Yet with bullets in her heart the powerful creature had leaped at Jornado and her claws scarred his face and breast; blood was trickling from the wounds. Daunt leaped past her body that slumped in death and bent over Lemft. They carried him to the bed and worked over him all night and at dawn prepared to take him to a hospital on the coast.

By daylight Daunt saw the trail of blood from where the ape fell on the steps and path, but her body was gone, abducted silently in the night. His mind flew to the facts he knew about Ti Fong, whose magic had terrified the natives and made them compliant to his will. Tales of his cleverness were among the stories when two or three white men gathered together. He was to hear more startling stories a few weeks later when he and Jornado visited the hospital where Lemft was recuperating after the results of over-indulgence in schnapps, tropic heat and loneliness, and shock. His gratitude to Jornado was sincere enough to prompt a gift, which he offered between babblings of witchcraft concerning the ape.

"You saw that it was the girl, didn't you?—the soul of her, her brain and memory in the ape's body. How else could she have known the endearments that passed between Maylo and me? But you saw only her dance. For weeks I endured her visits, her attempts to love me, and I was helpless in her power. Ti Fong did it. He transplanted the soul of Maylo to the ape's body to destroy my mind. He is an arch-fiend. Beware of Ti Fong, my friends!"

"It is one bit of advice I shall act upon," said Daunt.

"You must take no risk," Lemft continued to Jornado. "You have saved me from a madhouse and I am grateful. There is an island I have leased for your use during your lifetime, where you can escape Ti Fong and set up that kingdom you craved, my friend. Don't thank me. It is yours to rule as you like while you live."

Before they left, the transfer of the island to Jornado was made.

"Gratitude!" cried Daunt as they came away with Jornado expressing his delight at the news. "It's hush-money. He admitted the girl was beaten to death. You're getting your precious island to keep your mouth shut about the crime."

"The whole affair is one tale that is not told lest those concerned end up in an asylum," said Jornado. "But I know those islands abandoned a century or two ago by the Dutch. We could stock it with black panthers, and try Birds of Paradise. If they thrived we'd have stock for a steady income, easy to trap and ship, Daunt. Those pay the best anyway, and on an island they'd be easily caught. Let's chuck the saladang order and try for a few pairs of panthers, provision the schooner and land the animals when we go to look over my kingdom."

Daunt was looking at the chart where the island was marked in red ink, a speck on the map far from the lanes of travel.

"Not too far away for safety from Ti Fong," he commented.

"I'm not worrying about Ti Fong," snapped Jornado. "I'll admit he's master of trickery, in league with the cleverest rogues in Asia, but he's only human. That ape was trained to plague Lemft, who was half licked anyway by loneliness. As a matter of fact I'm going to call on Ti Fong and see those Celestial Singers he has bred and made such a mystery about. Ever hear of them?"

"Yes, and I've heard of mythical Chinese dragons and blue moons and sea serpents," said Captain Daunt. "But I'm willing to be convinced. Let's hope Ti Fong doesn't know you shot his ape."

STORIES about Ti Fong said that he had been a mandarin high in favor with the old Empress Tsu Hi. He had foreseen the downfall of the Manchu dynasty in China and had shipped from his Manchurian estate the hoarded ingots of gold and silver and wealth of jewels to a South Sea refuge. He had been ambassador for the Empress in Paris and St. Petersburg, and after the war had taken for his latest wife a Russian grand duchess, a refugee from the Red Terror. Ti Fong was old in years, according to the records, but young enough and vigorous owing to some formula of drugs or diet that preserved his body and faculties to accomplish control of a commerce in mysterious merchandise that stretched like the tentacles of an octopus over the seas. One of his homes in a Sumatran valley embodied all the beauties in miniature of the Forbidden City and Summer Palace, and among its attractions were his Celestial Singers.

"They are said to have the song of the nightingale, the plumage of peacocks and

the long-tailed cock of Ku," said Jornado to Daunt. "Ti Fong says his family has been evolving the birds for six centuries. They rate higher than his gods, on a par with his ancestors, one reason he lit out with his wealth to go on breeding them when the loyal mandarins went down with the Old Buddha. But his disloyalty made him a hunted man. His only safety was to outwit pursuit and hunt down his enemies, and he spared no means of perfecting protective measures in Black Art as well as guards and weapons. It isn't hard to scare natives into fits, and apparently Ti Fong tried some magic on Herr Lemft. Anyway, the description of the birds is tempting. They might do well on my island, Daunt."

"Come on, I'm game. You shot the ape, not I," said Daunt.

JORNADO'S request to see the birds was answered by an invitation to call, with minute instructions for their arrival before dawn to hear the bird's marvelous song. Leaving the car at some distance, they were conducted by a servant on foot to a corner of a courtyard wall draped in massed profusion by scented blossoms. There were gleams of lotus pools and stone griffins, and as darkness lifted Daunt saw that shrubs and small trees were enclosed in an immense expanse of fine wire screen.

While the stars paled, the two visitors guarded the sound of their breathing and watched the moon grow dim. The servant who admitted them dropped silently to his knees as Ti Fong appeared in a doorway, the sinister mask-like face slashed by the lines of thin lips and eyebrows, his forehead shortened by a black cap with the coral button of his rank. Silently he bent his head in greeting, and a finger touched his lips, warning them against sound or movement. He pointed to tall perches on which sat two birds with heads tucked under their wings.

At the first rosy flush of dawn a girl came through a moon-gate of the garden and stood against the massed iris surrounding the pool, colorful as another flower in a jade dress with its full skirt banded in blue, green and crimson embroidery. The white oval of her face was framed in dusky hair and to Daunt's gaze betrayed the mixed blood of white Slav and Mongolian parentage in startling loveliness. Unaware of strangers in the shadow, her lips puckered to whistle a soft call that wakened the birds. They stretched wings and claws, preened with their beaks and cocked their heads to watch her glide to the foot of the perches.

In the growing light their bodies seemed fashioned of jewels, brilliant glowing colors, iridescent "eyes" spotted thickly and elongated toward tails which fell like metallic fringes of gleaming radiance to white matting that covered a cement courtyard floor. Eighteen feet of pulsating color, airy as unspun silk, swayed in those tails like a fan of tinted thistledown in the hand of a woman who dances to muted music, as the girl's whistled call excited them with morning hunger.

Kneeling, she placed rice from a bowl between her lips as the cock bird swooped down, strutted toward her and took the grains from the crimson flower of her mouth again and again. Satisfied, the bird soared to his perch, his throat swelled and shot brilliance, as a song of songs poured into the morning stillness.

Daunt was staring, listening to liquid music, disturbed only by the clinking of the fine chain attached to the hen's foot as she alighted on the mat to eat rice from the girl's lips. At Daunt's ear the voice of Ti Fong quietly said:

"The song is not so fine as it was. Moulting time is near. In a month or less the tail feathers will be off and new ones starting, and there will be no song."

"Gorgeous, beautiful——" Daunt was murmuring superlatives.

"The work of centuries," said Ti Fong. "While my family has been breeding the birds, nations have risen and fallen, and I almost destroyed what had been achieved by lavishing so much care upon them that they refused to propagate their beauty. They were so vain of it that they were not interested in the purpose of those love-songs until my daughter Bibi-Ti began devoting herself to them. She showered them with adulation. She was able to interest them in one another. Now we have a nest of fledglings and another of incubating eggs. They are royal birds and refuse to degrade themselves by hatching and rearing their broods. . . ." His words halted.

Jornado had approached the girl, and the hen bird swooped to the perch, the bird-song ended abruptly.

"You will have morning rice with me, Captain Daunt. I regret to hasten you from the court, but visitors affect these birds, and to me they are priceless, more valuable than the Kohinoor or the six-pound-weight ruby of Somnaut. Their lives depend on my daughter because they will take food from no one else. It was a situation causing us anxiety because she is to marry a man of my race in two weeks. But for the sake of my Celestial Singers he has agreed to waive the honored custom of carrying his bride over his own threshold and will make his home here."

TI FONG was angry at Jornado's bold attempt at speech with the girl, whose eyes revealed the sudden tempestuous emotions of his blazing admiration and soft speeches for her ear alone. It was as bold a wooing as Daunt had ever seen, and it imperiled them both. He was glad when Ti Fong deliberately spoke to the girl, who seemed startled, even frightened as she turned and went through the Moon Gate. Jornado stared after her with his heart in his eyes and came reluctantly.

"The birds are not the greatest beauty in your garden," he told Ti Fong. "But I would like to possess a pair."

"Should the nestlings show that the strain is set, who am I to hide my triumph from the world?" said wily old Ti Fong. "But they are difficult to rear, though on the island where I hear you plan to establish a home, they might do well, even as the Birds of Paradise."

"News reaches you quickly, Ti Fong," said Jornado. "I plan to raise black panthers there for shipment. There are orang-outangs on it, and I hope to try Birds of Paradise for easy trapping and shipment."

Daunt could feel the bristling challenge between Jornado and Ti Fong and was glad when the meal ended and they could set out for their car. Ti Fong insisted on their riding to it in his own big limousine, but during their return trip Jornado seemed in a trance.

"Girl-struck?" asked Daunt. "It's time we started for your island, Jornado. We've seen a miracle, and it's time to come out of the clouds."

"More than one miracle. I'd rather have Bibi-Ti than a flock of Celestial Singers."

"You fool!" exclaimed Daunt. "The sooner you're away the safer I'll feel. Ti Fong knows all about you and Lemft's ape. You'd better dig in and stock the schooner while I go after the panthers. And I'll be back in two weeks or less,

expecting to haul up the mudhooks and get out, while the going is good."

TWELVE days later Daunt had returned with one pair of black cats behind cage bars and news that another pair would be delivered at a port of call down the coast to be picked up. Jornado had the vessel stocked and fueled and was ready to start when the tide served that night. He had gone into the village on some pretext and left Daunt sitting on deck watching the slow stars wheel and glad that Jornado had said nothing more about Ti Fong.

He was startled at the appearance of a big car without lights purring down to the wharf. There were too few cars in that country to be in doubt about Ti Fong's limousine. From the door the huge figure of Jornado emerged, carrying the daughter of Ti Fong and running toward the gang-plank. He stood her on her feet on the schooner deck, kissed her and said:

"Run below, sweetheart. I'll fetch the birds. Lively, Daunt!"

Before Daunt could protest, he dashed back to the car and came running again, swinging two wicker cages.

"Kick her up, Loga," he called to the quartermaster.

"Jornado, you can't do this!" cried Daunt. "Good God, man!"

But Jornado's vehemence had galvanized the crew into action, and further protestations were halted at the sight of a woman's face at the window of the limousine, agonized as the schooner's light struck it, the Russian wife of Ti Fong deliberately assisting Jornado to elope with her daughter and the Celestial Singers.

The screw was kicking up a riot astern as the vessel backed and turned, headed for the open sea. Jornado had run below with the birds. Daunt stood staring at the limousine, shining in black and silver on the wharf, as it started forward, gathered speed and plunged into water deeper because of high tide. When he ran aft with news of that tragic end to an unhappy woman's life, Jornado himself was at the engine control, speeding it until the fine shrill hum of motors deafened them both.

When he relinquished his post, Jornado busied himself in the spare cabin given over to house the birds and arranging still another for Bibi-Ti. Recriminations were useless. But Daunt's sleep bred nightmares. He was all for leaving extra panthers behind and putting leagues of ocean between themselves and Ti Fong.

"To hell with Ti Fong!" was Jornado's ultimatum. "You've paid to have the panthers brought, haven't you? Head her in. If you're afraid to go ashore, I'm not."

"Go ashore if you choose," said Daunt doggedly.

"Scared of a Chink!" shouted Jornado, and laughed. Never had he looked more magnificent. The adoration of the small lovely girl in the cabin, which she seldom left, had set Jornado aflame. He stalked the deck like a god from Olympus, swaggered like a buccaneer and left the vessel for Daunt to look after.

The Celestial Singers had moulted their long tails, but Bibi-Ti was seldom far from them except to walk the deck after nightfall beside Jornado. Daunt was a little awed at the splendor of love enveloping both and did not darken it by mentioning the tragedy at the wharf for some time.

"I wish you'd forget those extra panthers," he urged. "Ti Fong will kill you for this, Jornado."

"He may try, but on that island there are old Dutch cannons and shells, Lemft

said. I'll guard the lagoon so no boat can enter without my orders. If anything happens to me, Ti Fong will kill Bibi-Ti. But on that island we'll be safe. I'll make a palace for her out of the old Dutch mansion. I'll set her up like Sheba, with tame black panthers at her feet and a guard of trained orang-outangs around her. If Ti Fong can train the apes, so can I. What man has done, man can do, Daunt." Defiantly Jornado shook his fist in the direction of the hills where Ti Fong mourned the loss of the birds and the empty Fragrant House bereaved of his wife and daughter.

Daunt's sympathies were with Ti Fong. Then he felt perturbation seizing and shaking him as the hot, tawny-colored sky sent him to inspect the barometer. He tapped it and stared again.

"The damn' thing is cock-eyed," he said to Jornado.

"Crawling out of the bottom, all right. Better head in for those panthers and give her all she'll take. Precious cargo aboard."

As if the gods Ti Fong served rushed to answer his demands, a storm of mighty fury hounded them with its sulfurous portents, the yellow sky, the sea crawling like a cur cringing under a lash.

"It looks bad," agreed Jornado. "And listen! If anything should happen, Bibi-Ti and the birds are to be taken to that island. Ti Fong would have married her to a Chink she'd never seen. Her mother was a damned unhappy woman with Ti Fong. That's why she helped me take Bibi-Ti and the birds. They'd have died without Bibi-Ti anyway, and she wouldn't leave them behind."

"What do you imagine happened to Bibi-Ti's mother?" asked Daunt.

"She intended to drive to a port and take a steamer for some place where Ti Fong wouldn't find her."

"He won't find her," said Daunt grimly, and explained what had happened. "You've done enough to turn him into a devil that would make the old Scriptural devil a Santa Claus by comparison, Jornado."

"I hope he's mad enough to burst and end a nuisance," was Jornado's retort. The lodestone of a *grande passion* offset the enormity of his folly, but an inward monitor, like a cat's whiskers warning of too narrow an aperture for escape, troubled Daunt as they sighted the hazy mountains of southern Sumatra and were flying from the eery moaning of a storm beginning at the end of the world, rising to a screech of wind that had not yet touched the glassy sea. Jornado hurled defiance at the screaming elements:

"Howl, damn you! I've beaten you in as I beat Ti Fong!"

His good fortune held. They anchored safely in a shelter not too violently disturbed for little trade canoes to ride out, but all hell broke loose beyond the roadstead and they would wait its fury.

"No, you're not coming on deck to sell fruit or eggs or anything," Jornado shouted to the boat natives. "I don't need anything but what I've got: life, love and an island kingdom!" But it seemed to Daunt he was showing fear of Ti Fong's cunning at last.

When the storm let up, the cage of panthers came out lashed across two big canoes and was loaded on the vessel; and in relief at getting the business over, Jornado treated the natives to drinks and tobacco, and watched them leaving, hauling their boats over the winking puddles of tide flats at ebb-time.

"As soon as there's water enough to get out, we'll fly," said Jornado. "I'll keep deck-watch till eight bells and call you."

Daunt had been strengthening and lashing fast the cage of enraged panthers, and his exertions were responsible for as sound a sleep as he remembered. The quartermaster's touch on his shoulder wakened him. Fear blanched the face of the dark-skinned Marshall Islander. His speech labored between his own lingo and pidgin.

Daunt dressed and went on deck. Wind had cleared the storm clouds, and starlight showed him the body of Jornado near the rail and pouring from it the dark viscous blood of his veins. Daunt bent over as the quartermaster gibbered in terror. Jornado had been decapitated and his head was gone!

But as Daunt straightened, sick, faint with horror, the screw began to hum, the schooner was backing and heading again into seas still troubled. A wind-blown cloud spattered, then poured rain, and Daunt stood soaking, heedless of everything but the vengeance of Ti Fong.

It could be nothing else. Daunt realized there was grim justice, tempered with mercy unusual in a Chinese whose race had perfected refinement of torture unequaled in the world.

There was nothing Daunt could do but head for the island lest Ti Fong take similar vengeance on his daughter. A sudden fear for her safety sent him below to knock on her cabin door.

"Where is he?" she asked in her slurred pretty speech as she opened the door.

Daunt could not tell her what had happened. She was like a lovely child in her white silk pajama suit, and the light of the cabin showed him a photograph of Jornado on the wall above a small Buddha on a shelf. Draping the picture were her strings of pearls and priceless jade of red and the rarest imperial green. A love affair of exquisite perfection had begun—and ended terribly.

"Bibi-Ti, he had to go ashore on business. He told me to take you and the birds to the island and he would follow as soon as possible."

She pondered the explanation a moment. "Perhaps it would be best that way. The birds have felt they were sharing my caresses and I should not leave them night or day."

Daunt was glad she was gullible enough to believe his invention.

Through strewn wreckage of the storm they came to seas of burning jade and purple by day, webbed with phosphorescence by night, and the sea-fire tempted Bibi-Ti to the deck, where she stood beside him speaking of Jornado, always of Jornado.

"He will be glad the birds are in health, though it separated us on the voyage. And I have news for him. I will give him a son to rule his island kingdom when we are called to the ancestors."

"Good God!" said Captain Daunt, mentally hectic over the outcome of this new complication.

THE island he sought lay green on the lazy cobalt sea, guarded by barrier-reefs through which he picked a slow course, flying the lead as he went, and watching for curling jade waters over submerged coral fangs. Palms like bunched sabers glittered in sun and wind. The long white coral reef swept from its tip like a dagger to a hilt of red rock, and through the glass Daunt saw natives on the rock and spurts of red dust from tools with which they gouged it. But he thought nothing about their curious occupation at the time.

He landed on coral sand and found a path overgrown with lianas leading to

the long-deserted work of ancient Dutchmen abandoned to the natives and the elements. Orange trees had run wild. Ripe fruit fell as he approached, golden shaddocks rolled and bounced from the marble steps of a square old stone dwelling and plopped into a pool fed and drained by stone conduits leading from the hills to the sea. Vines and flowers waved pallidly through empty window-frames, and as Daunt entered an orang-outang leaped from an upper room to near-by tree branches.

He set his men to clearing the rooms of debris, shoveling rotted fruit into the sea, scouring floors and walls, building the great screen cage for the Celestial Singers. Only when it was finished and the house furnished did Bibi-Ti come ashore with the birds that required her devotion constantly. Daunt and his natives hauled the panther cages into the thick jungle far beyond the house to release the cats, after which he explored the island, and found it exceeded even Jornado's expectations. At a straggling village on one side, natives showed him bêche-de-mer and trocha shell, spice trees and vines. Small monkeys pelted him with debris, and patriarchal orang-outangs peered boldly from the trees. And when he came to the red rock he found a village of new huts and natives shaping the stone into a figure curiously ape-like, hunched and squatted, with its uncouth head gazing sullenly out to sea.

Something about the crude form stirred and crawled like maggots in his brain, reminding him of the *danse macabre* of Lemft's she-ape; but when he questioned them the little brown men said they were making a god. Only later did Daunt recall the freshness of their hut thatch and remember that his Malay speech was understood by them though the other village spoke a different lingo.

He was glad to return to the civilized sanctuary of the house, where the fine napery, silver and glass that Jornado had provided for his bride gleamed under candle-lights on the table between him and Bibi-Ti. She was charming, and Daunt ached with pity for her, though the girl was gay as a child, speaking of Jornado's coming and talking of things quaintly mixed in mind, the Russian teaching of her mother and Chinese training of Ti Fong's house. Daunt wondered what the end would be, since he dared not desert her on the island and dared not take her within the long reach of Ti Fong's punishment.

It was impossible not to fall under the languidly lovely spell of the island, but Daunt speculated on its rich resources once he could leave and start trading again. In three months he was wakened each dawn by the songs of the Celestial Singers. The days were his own in which to wander, make friends with the island natives and persuade them to fetch shell and dried sea-slugs, and make copra against a day when he would leave. At evening he sat on the stoep hearing night rustlings in the thickets beyond the clearing and oranges plop-plop down the steps and splash into the pool. The only menace was the curiosity of orang-outangs that peered in the house windows, but Bibi-Ti was not afraid. He heard her talk to them as she did to the Celestial Singers.

"In Ti Fong's house we had them for servants," she told Daunt. "They understood our talk and spoke to us. I will try to tame them, perhaps teach them to help the house-boys."

Daunt's mind flew to Lemft's obsession regarding the ape Maylo, but in seven months of Bibi-Ti's attempts to tame the great apes they were still merely curious and a little bolder.

A speck on the horizon one afternoon held him engrossed in watching it grow into the gear and hull of a vessel streaking toward the island. Bibi-Ti ran down to where he stood on shore wishing he could have manned the ancient cannons that now were polished and flanked by small pyramids of rusted iron shells. But ramming them with powder, sighting them and applying lighted tow was the art of a century gone.

The oncoming vessel was a yacht, faster than his own, painted black, pugnacious with small modern guns clamped to the decks, and she swooped at the island, veered sharply between barrier reefs, and slipped into the lagoon through a passage so intricate that his vessel had crawled slowly. Her helmsman was no stranger to that passage.

She danced on the clear water over sea gardens of coral, dipped and curtsied in her own swell. A small boat was smartly lowered and a hunched figure dropped down a rope, unshipped the oars as the yacht's propeller kicked foam on the lagoon and she turned and slipped out and away. The glass showed Daunt her crew of Malays, naked except for loin-rags, wearing the fancy head-gear of sea Dyaks. Then he was staring at a hairy ape in the small boat, whose short-thumbed hands gripped the oars and pulled with the skill of an old hand, heading toward shore.

IN THE tropic heat Daunt shivered; his body trickled with cold sweat. The friendly natives who had gathered to see the arrival of the vessel fled. The boat touched coral, and eyes of human agony in the head of an orang-outang returned Daunt's gaze. Around the sparsely haired skull was a puckered wound scar like the one circling the head of Maylo on that night in Lemft's bungalow. Daunt felt his knees knocking together as sounds came from the black lips, guttural, unintelligible.

Daunt was assuring himself that apes didn't sit in a boat and try to speak. They chattered among themselves; a mother-ape would croon to her young or scream in rage, and bull apes roared in fury, but they did not utter those hesitant sounds that so strangely resembled the sound of his name:

"Daw—nt. Daw—nt. It-ss-zz . . . Zhor—naw—do-o-o."

Daunt couldn't and wouldn't believe. This was only another of Ti Fong's tricks to bedevil him, another trained ape to hound him to insanity such as Lemft suffered. And he had not robbed Ti Fong except to take Bibi-Ti beyond the arch-fiend's power. He licked his dry lips and glanced down the coast nervously and saw on the coral spit natives who had carved the rock waving their arms and yelling at the vessel, pleading for it to call and take them away. The truth was forcing his belief that Ti Fong had dropped them there to carve the Red God, prototype of this ape in the boat which was now getting to its feet, uttering its pitiful plea:

"Daw—nt. It-ss-zz . . . Zhor—naw—do-o-o," clearer now, but with Jornado's inflection when speaking his own name.

"Yoo-oo-o . . . do—ont . . . bee-lee-eeve. I di-id no-ot bee-lee-ve till one da-ay I sa-aw thi-izz ha-and." The ape's hand was held out, turned at the wrist pivot in a gesture of despair that made Daunt pity the creature as he would a hurt dog. Yet he fought belief until the man-ape spoke again:

"Te-ell me-ee . . . a-bo-owt Bee-ee-bee-ee Tee-ee."

Ti Fong had not pronounced his daughter's name like that. It was Jor-

nado's own way of speaking it. Daunt's control, grown brittle, shattered like glass. Fear made him speak as he would to the inmate of an asylum claiming to be Nero or Napoleon.

"Bibi-Ti is well. She is in the house. But if you are Jornado as you say, tell me what happened to you. Who trained you to speak? Who brought you here? And why?"

"Ti Fong-g-g," the sound of it hummed like a snapped wire. The labored speech went on with an incredible tale while Daunt struggled helplessly in the grip of what seemed a paralyzing nightmare that bound his legs and arms so that he couldn't escape.

As Ti Fong had transplanted the brain of the half-caste girl Maylo into the skull of a she-ape, he had grafted the brain of Jornado in the head of this creature. Jornado's brain had roused from drugged unconsciousness to find his body strapped helplessly. Chinese master-surgeons attended him assiduously, and when the agony of his head was gone and his mind cleared they unbound one arm. He saw its hairy length and the hand of an ape. Ti Fong had come and tormented him with the tale of his vengeance. And as the story ended, rage swelled the ape-king's body. The frightful roar bursting from his chest silenced the chattering of little monkeys peering from the trees, and the gaudy parrots squawked and streaked into the deeper jungle.

"Stop it!" yelled Daunt. "You'll frighten Bibi-Ti. She hoped this vessel brought you. Jornado—if you are Jornado—you've got to know that the lives of Bibi-Ti and your unborn child depend on your mercy now. She must never know, or you'll complete the vengeance of Ti Fong, who also brought natives here to mark the island with that ape-god of red rock. She needs protection. The wild apes are curious about the house and stare through the windows. She has tried to tame them, but I've feared the day when they grow too bold. . . . Look, Jornado!"

For Daunt had glanced nervously around and his blood froze at the sight of stealthy movements in the green dark wall of foliage. Peering from thickets, hanging from branches, the great apes had trooped at that roar of a bull ape's lungs. One giant brute swung down, glaring from red shining eyes and growling a stuttering cry.

DAUNT'S escape to the house was cut off. He backed toward the boat on the coral, hearing Jornado the ape mouthing animal talk that swelled to arrogant boasting as he thumped his chest and roared again and again and suddenly leaped at the wild ape.

Fear-thralled, Daunt watched the battle of monsters, and around them hung the staring circle of giant apes like spectators at a battle of pugilists gone mad, obeying no rules but the law of rending claws and fangs. Daunt crouched and darted down the shore. He reached the house through a jungle silent of bird voices and monkey chattering, voiced only by the distant muffled roaring of fighting beasts which presently fell silent, and he called Bibi-Ti.

Native women answered him with news that kept Daunt prowling with guns at his belt, guarding the grounds, fearing the outcome of the battle on the beach, now ended, if the buzz and hum and clack of insect life beginning at dark was a sign of peace.

Exhausted by fear, he saw the silver and rose of dawn put out the stars, and heard the song of the Celestial Singers. And a woman called him to the upper room, where the wail of a baby met his

ears, and he saw Bibi-Ti, white-faced but radiant-eyed, looking from the window at a great ape that sat on the branch of a tree near by.

"It is a daughter," she said to Daunt. "He would have wanted a son, I think. But it will not matter now. For when the woman told me it was a girl and I cried from disappointment, he called my name."

Her hand pointed to the ape in the trees.

"They are almost as we are, you know. Only they are wiser, for they hear voices in the wind like the radio in Ti Fong's house which brought voices and music from far countries. And he told me that Jornado would not return as I knew him, but his soul was near me, guarding me and the child. And I must rule this island for her as he would rule the jungle. He is the king of the jungle now. And you are to gather the copra and shell and sell it and bring back everything to make it safe and beautiful for Jornado's daughter and me. You do not believe he spoke to me?" she cried. "But I shall make you believe. Come here, Jornado," she spoke to the ape.

The branches moved as the great creature swung to the window and through it, crouching beside the massive old Dutch bed with bowed head while the pretty hand of Bibi-Ti patted the mighty shoulder.

"Tell him what you told me," she said.

"I . . . am . . . the soul . . . of Jornado . . . sent to take possession of the king-ape's body and protect the woman he loved and his child . . . serving her, obeying her, loyal to her service till death. I am Jornado, invisible owner of this island until my death ends the lease of it granted to Jornado the man. The wild apes obey me, for I have killed their king. All the jungle creatures obey my rule, which shall last until I have repaid vengeance that Ti Fong has begun and will only end when he has paid in full for his crimes.

"The island is rich in cargoes. Through the night I have seen the shell and copra, the bêche-de-mer dried for shipping, the black panthers with their young, and orchids that white men prize. It holds wealth to be used in pursuing Ti Fong, which is the task of Jornado's vessel and his friend, Daunt.

"For Ti Fong, who sent men to mark it with the Red God, will not rest until death quiets him. But I am on guard while you sail out, Captain Daunt, the weapon of my vengeance. But here no evil of man's making shall land. Bibi-Ti will rule, and after her the child. For them it must be kept like a Garden of the Lord, one spot where love and beauty reigns. For this end of vengeance has the soul of Jornado the man been given the strength of the ape's body. You will obey orders, Captain Daunt?"

Fear left Daunt. The mysterious beneficence of a presence burned by suffering of all human attributes except love and just wrath thralled him as he faced the soul of Jornado looking from the ape's eyes, and prepared to go about the business of gathering cargo and leaving the age-old trinity to their new-found paradise.

Another strange tale of Ti Fong and his weird surgery will appear in next month's
WEIRD TALES

Black God's Shadow

By C. L. MOORE

"She leaped backward in a panic, too late."

Another fascinating story about Jirel of Joiry, who went down into a terrible place of darkness to release a human soul from torment

THROUGH Jirel's dreams a faraway voice went wailing. She opened yellow eyes upon darkness and lay still for a while, wondering what had waked her and staring into the gloom of her tower chamber, listening to the familiar night sounds of the sentry on the battlements close overhead, the rattle of armor and the soft shuffle of feet in the straw laid down to muffle the sound so that Joiry's lady might sleep in peace.

And as she lay there in the dark, quite suddenly the old illusion came over her again. She felt the pressure of strong mailed arms and the weight of a bearded mouth insolently upon hers, and she closed her red lips on an oath at her own weakness and knew again the sting of helpless tears behind her eyelids.

She lay quiet, remembering. Guillaume—so hatefully magnificent in his armor, grinning down upon her from her

own dais in her own castle hall where her own dead soldiers lay scattered about upon the bloody flags. Guillaume—his arms hard about her, his mouth heavy upon her own. Even now anger swept like a flame across her memory in answer to the arrogance and scorn of that conqueror's kiss. Yet was it anger?—was it hatred? And how had she to know, until he lay dead at last at her vengeful feet, that it was not hate which bubbled up so hotly whenever she remembered the insolence of his arms, or that he had defeated her men and conquered unconquerable Joiry? For she had been the commander of the strongest fortress in the kingdom, and called no man master, and it was her proudest boast that Joiry would never fall, and that no lover dared lay hands upon her save in answer to her smile.

No, it had not been hatred which answered Guillaume's overwhelming arrogance. Not hate, though the fire and fury of it had gone storming like madness through her. So many loves had blown lightly through her life before—how was she to know this surge of heady violence for what it was, until too late? Well, it was ended now.

She had gone down the secret way that she and one other knew, down into that dark and nameless hell which none who wore a cross might enter, where God's dominion ended at the portals, and who could tell what strange and terrible gods held sway instead? She remembered the starry darkness of it, and the voices that cried along the wind, and the brooding perils she could not understand. No other thing than the flame of her—hatred?—could have driven her down, and nothing but its violence could have sustained her along the dark ways she went seeking a weapon worthy to slay Guillaume.

Well, she had found it. She had taken the black god's kiss. Heavy and cold upon her soul she had carried it back, feeling the terrible weight bearing down upon some intangible part of her that shuddered and shrank from the touch. She had fouled her very soul with that burden, but she had not guessed what terrible potentialities it bore within it, like some egg of hell's spawning to slay the man she loved.

Her weapon was a worthy one. She smiled grimly, remembering that—remembering her return, and how triumphantly he had accepted that kiss from hell, not understanding. . . . Again she saw the awful fruition of her vengeance, as the chill of her soul's burden shifted, through the meeting of their mouths, from her soul to his. Again she saw the spreading of that nameless emotion from Beyond through his shuddering body, an iron despair which no flesh and blood could endure.

Yes, a worthy weapon. She had periled her soul in the seeking of it, and slain him with a god-cursed kiss, and known too late that she would never love another man. Guillaume—tall and splendid in his armor, the little black beard split by the whiteness of his grin, and arrogance sneering from his scarred and scornful face. Guillaume—whose kiss would haunt her all the nights of her life. Guillaume—who was dead. In the dark she hid her face upon her bent arm, and the red hair fell forward to smother her sobs.

When sleep came again she did not know. But presently she was alone in a dim, formless place through whose mists the far-away voice wailed fretfully. It was a familiar voice with strange, plaintive overtones—a sad little lost voice wailing through the dark.

"Oh, Jirel," it moaned reedily, the tini-

est thread of sound. "Oh, Jirel—my murderess. . . ."

And in the dream her heart stood still, and—though she had killed more men than one—she thought she knew that voice, tiny and thin though it was in the bodiless dark of her sleep. And she held her breath, listening. It came again, "Oh, Jirel! It is Guillaume calling—Guillaume, whom you slew. Is there no end to your vengeance? Have mercy, oh my murderess! Release my soul from the dark god's torment. Oh Jirel—Jirel—I pray your mercy!"

Jirel awoke wet-eyed and lay there staring into the dark, recalling that pitiful little reedy wail which had once been Guillaume's rich, full-throated voice. And wondering. The dark god? True, Guillaume had died unshriven, with all his sins upon him, and because of this she had supposed that his soul plunged straight downward to the gates of hell.

Yet—could it be? By the power of that infernal kiss which she had braved the strange dark place underground to get as a weapon against him—by the utter strangeness of it, and the unhuman death he died, it must be that now his naked soul wandered, lost and lonely, through that nameless hell lit by strange stars, where ghosts moved in curious forms through the dark. And he asked her mercy—Guillaume, who in life had asked mercy of no living creature.

She heard the watch changing on the battlements above, and dropped again into an uneasy slumber, and once more entered the dim place where the little voice cried through the mist, wailing piteously for mercy from her vengeance. Guillaume—the proud Guillaume, with his deep voice and scornful eyes. Guillaume's lost soul wailing through her dreams . . . "Have mercy upon me, oh my murderess!" . . . and again she woke with wet eyes and started up, staring wildly around her in the gloom and thinking that surely she heard yet the echo of the little lost voice crying. And as the sound faded from her ears she knew that she must go down again.

For a while she lay there, shivering a little and forcing herself into the knowledge. Jirel was a brave woman and a savage warrior, and the most reckless soldier of all her men-at-arms. There was not a man for miles about who did not fear and respect Joiry's commander—her sword-keen beauty and her reckless courage and her skill at arms. But at the thought of what she must do to save Guillaume's soul the coldness of terror blew over her and her heart contracted forebodingly. To go down again—down into the perilous, star-lit dark among dangers more dreadful than she could put words to—dared she? Dared she go?

She rose at last, cursing her own weakness. The stars through the narrow windows watched her pull on her doeskin shirt and the brief tunic of linked mail over it. She buckled the greaves of a long-dead Roman legionary on her slim, strong legs, and, as on that unforgettable night not long since when she had dressed for this same journey, she took her two-edged sword unsheathed in her hand.

Again she went down through the dark of the sleeping castle. Joiry's dungeons are deep, and she descended a long way through the oozing, dank corridors underground, past cells where the bones of Joiry's enemies rotted in forgotten chains. And she, who feared no living man, was frightened in that haunted dark, and gripped her sword closer and clutched the cross at her neck with nervous fingers. The silence hurt her ears with its weight, and the dark was like a bandage over her straining eyes.

At the end of the last oozing passage, far underground, she came to a wall. With her free hand she set to work pulling the unmortared stones from their places, making an opening to squeeze through—trying not to remember that upon this spot that dreadful night tall Guillaume had died, with the black god's kiss burning upon his mouth and unnamable torment in his eyes. Here upon these stones. Against the darkness vividly she could see that torch-lit scene, and Guillaume's long, mailed body sprawled across the floor. She would never forget that. Perhaps even after she died she would remember the smoky, acrid smell of the torches, and the coldness of the stones under her bare knees as she knelt beside the body of the man she had killed; the choke in her throat, and the brush of the red hair against her cheek, falling forward to mask her tears from the stolid men-at-arms. And Guillaume —Guillaume . . .

She took her lip between her teeth resolutely, and turned her mind to the pulling out of stones. Presently there was a hole big enough for her slim height, and she pushed through into the solid dark beyond. Her feet were upon a ramp, and she went down cautiously, feeling her way with exploring toes. When the floor leveled she dropped to her knees and felt for the remembered circle in the pavement. She found that, and the curious cold ring in its center, of some nameless metal which daylight had never shone upon, metal so smooth and cold and strange that her fingers shuddered as she gripped it and heaved. That lid was heavy. As before, she had to take her sword in her teeth, for she dared not lay it down, and use both hands to lift the stone circle. It rose with an odd little sighing sound, as if some suction from below had gripped it and were released.

She sat on the edge for a moment, swinging her feet in the opening and gathering all her courage for the plunge. When she dared hesitate no longer, for fear she would never descend if she delayed another instant, she caught her breath and gripped her sword hard and plunged.

It must have been the strangest descent that the world has known—not a shaft but a spiral twisting down in smooth, corkscrew loops, a spiral made for no human creature to travel, yet into whose sides in some forgotten era a nameless human had cut notches for hands and feet, so that Jirel went down more slowly than if she had had to take an unbroken plunge. She slipped smoothly along down the spirals, barely braking her passage now and again by grasping at the notches in the wall when she felt herself sliding too fast.

Presently the familiar sickness came over her—that strange, inner dizziness as if the spiral were taking her not only through space but through dimensions, and the very structure of her body were altering and shifting with the shifting spirals. And it seemed, too, that down any other shaft she would have fallen more swiftly. This was not a free glide downward—she scarcely seemed to be falling at all. In the spiral there was neither up nor down, and the sickness intensified until in the whirling loops and the whirling dizziness she lost all count of time and distance, and slid through the dark in a stupor of her own misery.

AT LONG last the spiral straightened and began to incline less steeply, and she knew that she approached the end. It was hard work then, levering herself along the gentle slope on hands and knees, and when she came out at last into open darkness she scrambled to her

feet and stood panting, sword in hand, straining her eyes against the impenetrable dark of this place that must be without counterpart anywhere in the world, or outside it. There were perils here, but she scarcely thought of them as she set out through the dark, for remembering those greater perils beyond.

She went forward warily for all that, swinging her sword in cautious arcs before her that she might not run full-tilt into some invisible horror. It was an unpleasant feeling, this grouping through blackness, knowing eyes upon her, feeling presences near her, watching. Twice she heard hoarse breathing, and once the splat-splat of great wet feet upon stone, but nothing touched her or tried to bar her passage.

Nevertheless she was shaking with tension and terror when at last she reached the end of the passage. There was no visible sign to tell her that it was ended, but as before, suddenly she sensed that the oppression of those vast weights of earth on all sides had lifted. She was standing at the threshold of some mighty void. The very darkness had a different quality—and at her throat something constricted.

Jirel gripped her sword a little more firmly and felt for the crucifix at her neck —found it—lifted the chain over her head.

Instantly a burst of blinding radiance smote her dark-accustomed eyes more violently than a blow. She stood at a cave mouth, high on the side of a hill, staring out over the most blazing day she had ever seen. Heat and light shimmered in the dazzle: strangely colored light, heat that danced and shook. Day, over a dreadful land.

Jirel cried out inarticulately and clapped a hand over her outraged eyes, groping backward step by step into the sheltering dark of the cave. Night in this land was terrible enough, but day—no, she dared not look upon the strange hell save when darkness veiled it. She remembered that other journey, when she had raced the dawn up the hillside, shuddering, averting her eyes from the terror of her own misshapen shadow forming upon the stones. No, she must wait, how long she could not guess; for though it had been night above ground when she left, here was broad day, and it might be that day in this land was of a different duration from that she knew.

She drew back farther into the cave, until that dreadful day was no more than a blur upon the darkness, and sat down with her back to the rock and the sword across her bare knees, waiting. That blurred light upon the walls had a curious tinge of color such as she had never seen in any earthly daylight. It seemed to her that it shimmered—paled and deepened and brightened again as if the illumination were not steady. It had almost the quality of firelight in its fluctuations.

Several times something seemed to pass across the cave-mouth, blotting out the light for an instant, and once she saw a great, stooping shadow limned upon the wall, as if something had paused to peer within the cave. And at the thought of what might rove this land by day Jirel shivered as if in a chill wind, and groped for her crucifix before she remembered that she no longer wore it.

She waited for a long while, clasping cold hands about her knees, watching that blur upon the wall in fascinated anticipation. After a time she may have dozed a little, with the light, unresting sleep of one poised to wake at the tiniest sound or motion. It seemed to her that eternities went by before the light began to pale upon the cave wall.

She watched it fading. It did not move

across the wall as sunlight would have done. The blur remained motionless, dimming slowly, losing its tinge of unearthly color, taking on the blueness of evening. Jirel stood up and paced back and forth to limber her stiffened body. But not until that blur had faded so far that no more than the dimmest glimmer of radiance lay upon the stone did she venture out again toward the cave mouth.

Once more she stood upon the hilltop, looking out over a land lighted by strange constellations that sprawled across the sky in pictures whose outlines she could not quite trace, though there was about them a dreadful familiarity. And, looking up upon the spreading patterns in the sky, she realized afresh that this land, whatever it might be, was no underground cavern of whatever vast dimensions. It was open air she breathed, and stars in a celestial void she gazed upon, and however she had come here, she was no longer under the earth.

Below her the dim country spread. And it was not the same landscape she had seen on that other journey. No mighty column of shadowless light swept skyward in the distance. She caught the glimmer of a broad river where no river had flowed before, and the ground here and there was patched and checkered with pale radiance, like luminous fields laid out orderly upon the darkness.

She stepped down the hill delicately, poised for the attack of those tiny, yelping horrors that had raved about her knees once before. They did not come. Surprized, hoping against hope that she was to be spared that nauseating struggle, she went on. The way down was longer than she remembered. Stones turned under her feet, and coarse grass slashed at her knees. She was wondering as she descended where her search was to begin, for in all the dark, shifting land she saw nothing to guide her, and Guillaume's voice was no more than a fading memory from her dream. She could not even find her way back to the lake where the black god crouched, for the whole landscape was changed unrecognizably.

So when, unmolested, she reached the foot of the hill, she set off at random over the dark earth, running as before with that queer dancing lightness, as if the gravity pull of this place were less than that to which she was accustomed, so that the ground seemed to skim past under her flying feet. It was like a dream, this effortless glide through the darkness, fleet as the wind.

Presently she began to near one of those luminous patches that resembled fields, and saw now that they were indeed a sort of garden. The luminosity rose from myriads of tiny, darting lights planted in even rows, and when she came near enough she saw that the lights were small insects, larger than fireflies, and with luminous wings which they beat vainly upon the air, darting from side to side in a futile effort to be free. For each was attached to its little stem, as if they had sprung living from the soil. Row upon row of them stretched into the dark.

She did not even speculate upon who had sowed such seed here, or toward what strange purpose. Her course led her across a corner of the field, and as she ran she broke several of the stems, releasing the shining prisoners. They buzzed up around her instantly, angrily as bees, and wherever a luminous wing brushed her a hot pain stabbed. She beat them off after a while and ran on, skirting other fields with new wariness.

She crossed a brook that spoke to itself in the dark with a queer, whispering sound so near to speech that she paused for an instant to listen, then thought she

had caught a word or two of such dreadful meaning that she ran on again, wondering if it could have been only an illusion.

Then a breeze sprang up and brushed the red hair from her ears, and it seemed to her that she caught the faintest, far wailing. She stopped dead-still, listening, and the breeze stopped too. But she was almost certain she had heard that voice again, and after an instant's hesitation she turned in the direction from which the breeze had blown.

It led toward the river. The ground grew rougher, and she began to hear water running with a subdued, rushing noise, and presently again the breeze brushed her face. Once more she thought she could hear the dimmest echo of the voice that had cried in her dreams.

WHEN she came to the brink of the water she paused for a moment, looking down to where the river rushed between steep banks. The water had a subtle difference in appearance from water in the rivers she knew—somehow thicker, for all its swift flowing. When she leaned out to look, her face was mirrored monstrously upon the broken surface, in a way that no earthly water would reflect, and as the image fell upon its torrent the water broke there violently, leaping upward and splashing as if some hidden rock had suddenly risen in its bed. There was a hideous eagerness about it, as if the water were ravening for her, rising in long, hungry leaps against the rocky walls to splash noisily and run back into the river. But each leap came higher against the wall, and Jirel started back in something like alarm, a vague unease rising within her at the thought of what might happen if she waited until the striving water reached high enough.

At her withdrawal the tumult lessened instantly, and after a moment or so she knew by the sound that the river had smoothed over its broken place and was flowing on undisturbed. Shivering a little, she went on upstream whence the fitful breeze seemed to blow.

Once she stumbled into a patch of utter darkness and fought through in panic fear of walking into the river in her blindness, but she won free of the curious air-pocket without mishap. And once the ground under her skimming feet quaked like jelly, so that she could scarcely keep her balance as she fled on over the unstable section. But ever the little breeze blew and died away and blew again, and she thought the faint echo of a cry was becoming clearer. Almost she caught the far-away sound of "Jirel—" moaning upon the wind, and quickened her pace.

For some while now she had been noticing a growing pallor upon the horizon, and wondering uneasily if night could be so short here, and day already about to dawn. But no—for she remembered that upon that other terrible dawn which she had fled so fast to escape, the pallor had ringed the whole horizon equally, as if day rose in one vast circle clear around the nameless land. Now it was only one spot on the edge of the sky which showed that unpleasant, dawning light. It was faintly tinged with green that strengthened as she watched, and presently above the hills in the distance rose the rim of a vast green moon. The stars paled around it. A cloud floated across its face, writhed for an instant as if in some skyey agony, then puffed into a mist and vanished, leaving the green face clear again.

And it was a mottled face across which dim things moved very slowly. Almost it might have had an atmosphere of its own, and dark clouds floating sluggishly; and if that were so it must have been self-

luminous, for these slow masses dimmed its surface and it cast little light despite its hugeness. But there was light enough so that in the land through which Jirel ran great shadows took shape upon the ground, writhing and shifting as the moon-clouds obscured and revealed the green surface, and the whole night scene was more baffling and unreal than a dream. And there was something about the green luminance that made her eyes ache.

She waded through shadows as she ran now, monstrous shadows with a hideous dissimilarity to the things that cast them, and no two alike, however identical the bodies which gave them shape. Her own shadow, keeping pace with her along the ground, she did not look at after one shuddering glance. There was something so unnatural about it, and yet—yet it was like her, too, with a dreadful likeness she could not fathom. And more than once she saw great shadows drifting across the ground without any visible thing to cast them—nothing but the queerly shaped blurs moving soundlessly past her and melting into the farther dark. And that was the worst of all.

She ran on upwind, ears straining for a repetition of the far crying, skirting the shadows as well as she could and shuddering whenever a great dark blot drifted noiselessly across her path. The moon rose slowly up the sky, tinting the night with a livid greenness, bringing it dreadfully to life with moving shadows. Sometimes the sluggishly moving darknesses across its face clotted together and obscured the whole great disk, and she ran on a few steps thankfully through the unlighted dark before the moon-clouds parted again and the dead green face looked blankly down once more, the cloud-masses crawling across it like corruption across a corpse's face.

During one of these darknesses something slashed viciously at her leg, and she heard the grate of teeth on the greave she wore. When the moon unveiled again she saw a long bright scar along the metal, and a drip of phosphorescent venom trickling down. She gathered a handful of grass to wipe it off before it reached her unprotected foot, and the grass withered in her hand when the poison touched it.

All this while the river had been rushing past her and away, and as she ran it began to narrow and diminish; so she knew she must be approaching its head. When the wind blew she was sure now that she heard her own name upon it, in the small wail which had once been Guillaume's scornful voice. Then the ground began to rise, and down the hillside she mounted, the river fell tinkling, a little thread of water no larger than a brook.

THE tinkling was all but articulate now. The river's rush had been no more than a roaring threat, but the voice of the brook was deliberately clear, a series of small, bright notes like syllables, saying evil things. She tried not to listen, for fear of understanding.

The hill rose steeper, and the brook's voice sharpened and clarified and sang delicately in its silverly poisonous tones, and above her against the stars she presently began to discern something looming on the very height of the hill, something like a hulking figure motionless as the hill it crowned. She gripped her sword and slackened her pace a little, skirting the dark thing warily. But when she came near enough to make it out in the green moonlight she saw that it was no more than an image crouching there, black as darkness, giving back a dull gleam from its surface where the livid-

ness of the moon struck it. Its shadow moved uneasily upon the ground.

The guiding wind had fallen utterly still now. She stood in a breathless silence before the image, and the stars sprawled their queer patterns across the sky and the sullen moonlight poured down upon her and nothing moved anywhere but those quivering shadows that were never still.

The image had the shape of a black, shambling thing with shallow head sunk between its shoulders and great arms dragging forward on the ground. But something about it, something indefinable and obscene, reminded her of Guillaume. Some aptness of line and angle parodied in the ugly hulk the long, clean lines of Guillaume, the poise of his high head, the scornful tilt of his chin. She could not put a finger on any definite likeness, but it was unmistakably there. And it was all the ugliness of Guillaume—she saw it as she stared. All his cruelty and arrogance and brutish force. The image might have been a picture of Guillaume's sins, with just enough of his virtues left in to point its dreadfulness.

For an instant she thought she could see behind the black parody, rising from it and irrevocably part of it, a nebulous outline of the Guillaume she had never known, the scornful face twisted in despair, the splendid body writhing futilely away from that obscene thing which was himself—Guillaume's soul, rooted in the uglinesses which the image personified. And she knew his punishment—so just, yet so infinitely unjust.

And what subtle torment the black god's kiss had wrought upon him! To dwell in the full, frightful realization of his own sins, chained to the actual manifestation, suffering eternally in the obscene shape that was so undeniably himself—his worst and lowest self. It was just, in a way. He had been a harsh and cruel man in life. But the very fact that such punishment was agony to him proved a higher self within his complex soul—something noble and fine which writhed away from the unspeakable thing—himself. So the very fineness of him was a weapon to torture his soul, turned against him even as his sins were turned.

She understood all this in the timeless while she stood there with eyes fixed motionless upon the hulking shape of the image, wringing from it the knowledge of what its ugliness meant. And something in her throat swelled and swelled, and behind her eyelids burnt the sting of tears. Fiercely she fought back the weakness, desperately cast about for some way in which she might undo what she had unwittingly inflicted upon him.

And then all about her something intangible and grim began to form. Some iron presence that manifested itself only by the dark power she felt pressing upon her, stronger and stronger. Something coldly inimical to all things human. The black god's presence. The black god, come to defend his victim against one who was so alien to all his darkness—one who wept and trembled, and was warm with love and sorrow and desperate with despair.

She felt the inexorable force tightening around her, freezing her tears, turning the warmth and tenderness of her into gray ice, rooting her into a frigid immobility. The air dimmed about her, gray with cold, still with the utter deadness of the black god's unhuman presence. She had a glimpse of the dark place into which he was drawing her—a moveless, twilight place, deathlessly still. And an immense weight was pressing her down. The ice formed upon her soul, and the awful, iron despair which has no place

among human emotions crept slowly through the fibers of her innermost self.

She felt herself turning into something cold and dark and rigid—a black image of herself—a black, hulking image to prison the spark of consciousness that still burned.

Then, as from a long way off in another time and world, came the memory of Guillaume's arms about her and the scornful press of his mouth over hers. It had not happened to her. It had happened to someone else, someone human and alive, in a far-away place. But the memory of it shot like fire through the rigidness of the body she had almost forgotten was hers, so cold and still it was—the memory of that curious, raging fever which was both hate and love. It broke the ice that bound her, for a moment only, and in that moment she fell to her knees at the dark statue's feet and burst into shuddering sobs, and the hot tears flowing were like fire to thaw her soul.

Slowly that thawing took place. Slowly the ice melted and the rigidity gave way, and the awful weight of the despair which was no human emotion lifted by degrees. The tears ran hotly between her fingers. But all about her she could feel, as tangibly as a touch, the imminence of the black god, waiting. And she knew her humanity, her weakness and transience, and the eternal, passionless waiting she could never hope to outlast. Her tears must run dry—and then——

She sobbed on, knowing herself in hopeless conflict with the vastness of death and oblivion, a tiny spark of warmth and life fighting vainly against the dark engulfing it; the perishable spark, struggling against inevitable extinction. For the black god was all death and nothingness, and the powers he drew upon were without limit—and all she had to fight him with was the flicker within her called life.

But suddenly in the depths of her despair she felt something stirring. A long, confused blurring passed over her, and another, and another, and the strangest emotions tumbled through her mind and vanished. Laughter and mirth, sorrow and tears and despair, love, envy, hate. She felt somehow a lessening in the oppressive peril about her, and she lifted her face from her hands.

Around the dark image a mist was swirling. It was tenuous and real by turns, but gradually she began to make out a ring of figures—girls' figures, more unreal than a vision—dancing girls who circled the crouching statue with flying feet and tossing hair—girls who turned to Jirel her own face in as many moods as there were girls. Jirel laughing, Jirel weeping, Jirel convulsed with fury, Jirel honey-sweet with love. Faster they swirled, a riot of flashing limbs, a chaos of tears and mirth and all humanity's moods. The air danced with them in shimmering waves, so that the land was blurred behind them and the image seemed to shiver within itself.

And she felt those waves of warmth and humanity beating insistently against the hovering chill which was the black god's presence. Life and warmth, fighting back the dark nothingness she had thought unconquerable. She felt it wavering about her as a canopy wavers in the wind. And slowly she felt it melting. Very gradually it lifted and dissipated, while the wild figures of gayety and grief and all kindred emotions whirled about the image and the beat of their aliveness pulsed through the air in heat-waves against the grayness of the god's cold.

And something in Jirel knew warmly that the image of life as a tiny spark

flickering out in limitless black was a false one—that without light there can be no darkness—that death and life are interdependent, one upon the other. And that she, armored in the warmth of her aliveness, was the black god's equal, and a worthy foe. It was an even struggle. She called up the forces of life within her, feeling them hurled against the darkness, beating strongly upon the cold and silence of oblivion. Strength flowed through her, and she knew herself immortal in the power of life.

How long this went on she never knew. But she felt victory pulsing like wine through her veins even before the cold pall lifted. And it lifted quite suddenly. In a breath, without warning, the black god's presence was not. In that breath the swirling dancers vanished, and the night was empty about her, and the singing of triumph ran warmly through her body.

But the image—the image! The queerest change was coming over it. The black, obscene outlines were unstable as mist. They quavered and shook, and ran together and somehow melted. . . . The green moon veiled its face again with clouds, and when the light returned the image was no more than a black shadow running fluidly upon the ground; a shadow which bore the outlines of Guillaume—or what might have been Guillaume. . . .

The moon-shadows moved across the livid disk, and the shadow on the ground moved too, a monstrous shadow latent with a terrible implication of the horrors dormant within the being which cast the shadow, dreadful things that Guillaume might have been and done. She knew then why the misshapen shadows were so monstrous. They were a dim, leering hinting at what might have been—what might yet be—frightful suggestions of the dreadfulnesses dormant within every living being. And the insane suggestions they made were the more terrible because, impossible beyond nightmares though they seemed, yet the mind intuitively recognized their truth. . . .

A little breeze sprang up fitfully, and the shadow moved, slipping over the stones without a sound. She found herself staggering after it on legs that shook, for the effort of that battle with the god had drained her of all strength. But the shadow was gliding faster now, and she dared not lose it. It floated on without a sound, now fast, now slow, its monstrous outlines shifting continually into patterns each more terribly significant than the last. She stumbled after it, the sword a dead weight in her hand, her red head hanging.

In five minutes she had lost all sense of direction. Beyond the hilltop the river ceased. The moving moonlight confused her and the stars traced queer pictures across the sky, from which she could get no bearings. The moon was overhead by now, and in those intervals when its clouds obscured the surface and the night was black around her, Guillaume's misshapen shadow vanished with the rest, and she suffered agonies of apprehension before the light came out again and she took up the chase anew.

The dark blot was moving now over a rolling meadowland dotted with queerly shaped trees. The grass over which she ran was velvet-soft, and she caught whiffs of perfume now and again from some tree that billowed with pale bloom in the moonlight. The shadow wavering ahead of her moved forward to pass one tall tree a little apart from the rest, its branches hanging in long, shaking streamers from its central crown. She saw the dark shape upon the ground pause as it neared the tree, and shiver a little, and

then melt imperceptibly into the shadow cast by its branches. That tree-shadow, until Guillaume's touched it, had borne the shape of a monster with crawling tentacles and flattened, thrusting head, but at the moment of conjunction the two melted into one—all the tentacles leaped forward to embrace the newcomer, and the two merged into an unnamably evil thing that lay upon the ground and heaved with a frightful aliveness of its own.

Jirel paused at its edge, looking down helplessly. She disliked to set her foot even upon the edge of that hideous black shape, though she knew intuitively that it could not harm her. The joined shadows were alive with menace and evil, but only to things in their own plane. She hesitated under the tree, wondering vainly how to part her lover's shade from the thing that gripped it. She felt somehow that his shadow had not joined the other altogether willingly. It was rather as if the evil instinct in the tree-shape had reached out to the evil in Guillaume, and by that evil held him, though the fineness that was still his revolted to the touch.

Then something brushed her shoulder gently, and lapped around her arm, and she leaped backward in a panic, too late. The tree's swinging branches had writhed round toward her; and one already was wrapped about her body. That shadow upon the ground had been a clear warning of the danger dormant within the growth, had she only realized it before—a tentacled monster, lying in wait. Up swung her sword in a flash of green-tinged moonlight, and she felt the gripping branch yield like rubber under the blow. It gave amazingly and sprang back again, jerking her almost off her feet. She turned the blade against it, hewing desperately as she saw other branches curling around toward her. One had almost come within reach of her sword-arm, and was poising for the attack, when she felt her blade bite into the rubbery surface at last. Then with a root-deep shudder through all its members the tree loosed its hold and the severed limb fell writhing to the ground. Thick black sap dripped from the wound. And all the branches hung motionless, but upon the ground the shadow flung wildly agonized tentacles wide, and from the released grip Guillaume's shadow sprang free and glided away over the grass. Shaking with reaction, Jirel followed.

She gave more attention to the trees they passed now. There was one little shrub whose leaves blew constantly in shivering ripples, even when there was no wind, and its shadow was the shadow of a small leaping thing that hurled itself time and again against some invisible barrier and fell back, only to leap once more in panic terror. And one slim, leafless tree writhed against the stars with a slow, unceasing motion. It made no sound, but its branches twisted together and shuddered and strained in an agony more eloquent than speech. It seemed to wring its limbs together, agonized, dumb, with a slow anguish that never abated. And its shadow, dimly, was the shadow of a writhing woman.

And one tree, a miracle of bloom in the moonlight, swayed its ruffled branches seductively, sending out wave upon wave of intoxicating perfume and making a low, delightful humming, somehow like the melody of bees. Its shadow upon the ground was the shadow of a coiled serpent, lifting to strike.

JIREL was glad when they left the region of the trees and curved to the left down a long hill slope across which other shadows, without form, blew unceasingly with nothing to cast them. They raced noiselessly by, like wind-driven clouds.

Among them she lost and found and lost again the shape she followed, until she grew dizzy from trying to keep her footing upon a ground that quavered with the blowing shadows so that she never knew upon what her feet were stepping, and the dim thing she followed was a nothingness that threaded its way in and out of the cloud-shapes bafflingly.

She had the idea now that the shadow of her lover was heading toward some definite goal. There was purpose in its dim gliding, and she looked ahead for some sign of the place it aimed toward. Below the hill the land stretched away featurelessly, cloud-mottled in the livid moonlight. Drifts of mist obscured it, and there were formless dark patches and pale blotches upon the night, and here and there a brook crawled across the blackness. She was completely lost now, for the river had long since vanished and she saw no hill which might have been the one upon which she had emerged.

They crossed another belt of quaking land, and the shadow gained upon her as she staggered over the jelly-like surface. They came to a pale brook across which the shadow glided without a pause. It was a narrow, swift brook whose water chuckled thickly to itself in the dark. One stepping-stone broke the surface in the center of the stream, and she held her breath and leaped for it, not daring to slacken her pace. The stone gave under her foot like living flesh, and she thought she heard a groan, but she had gained the farther bank and did not pause to listen.

Then they were hurrying down another slope, the shadow gliding faster now, and more purposefully. And the slope went down and down, steeply, until it became the side of a ravine and the rocks began to roll under her stumbling feet. She saw the fleeting shadow slip over a ledge and down a steep bank and then plunge into the darkness which lay like water along the bottom of the gully, and she gave a little sob of despair, for she knew now that she had lost it. But she struggled on into the dark that swallowed her up.

It was like wading deeper and deeper into a tangible oblivion. The blackness closed over her head, and she was groping through solid night. It filled the hollow in a thick flood, and in the depths of it she could not even see the stars overhead. There was a moment of this blindness and groping, and then the moon rose.

Like a great leprous face it swung over the ravine's edge, the moon-clouds crawling across its surface. And that green light was an agony to her eyes, obscurely, achingly. It was like no mortal moonlight. It seemed endowed with a poisonous quality that was essentially a part of the radiance, and that unearthly, inexplicable light had an effect upon the liquid dark in the gully's bottom which no earthly moonlight could have had. It penetrated the blackness, broke it up into myriad struggling shadows that did not lie flat upon the ground, as all shadows should, but stood upright and three-dimensional and danced about her in a dizzy riot of nothingness taken shape. They brushed by her and through her without meeting obstruction, because for all their seeming solidity they were no more than shadows, without substance.

Among them danced the shape of Guillaume, and the outlines of it made her faint with terror, they were so like—and so dreadfully unlike—the Guillaume she had known, so leeringly suggestive of all the evil in him, and all the potential evil of mankind. The other shapes were ugly too, but they were the shapes of things whose real form she did not know, so that the implications latent in them she did not understand. But she missed no

subtle half-tone of the full dreadfulness which was Guillaume, and her mind staggered with the suggestions the shadow-form made.

"Guillaume——" she heard herself sobbing, "Guillaume!" and realized that it was the first articulate sound which had passed her lips since she entered here. At her voice the reeling shadow slowed a little and hesitated, and then very reluctantly began to drift toward her through the spinning shades.

And then without warning something immeasurably cold and still closed down around her once more. The black god's presence. Again she felt herself congealing, through and through, as the ice of eternal nothingness thickened upon her soul and the gray, dim, formless place she remembered took shape about her and the immense weight of that iron despair descended again upon her shuddering spirit. If she had had warning she could have struggled, but it came so suddenly that before she could marshal her forces for the attack she was frigid to the core with the chill of unhumanity, and her body did not belong to her, and she was turning slowly into a black shadow that reeled among shadows in a dreadful, colorless void. . . .

Sharply through this stabbed the fire-hot memory that had wakened her before —the weight of a man's bearded mouth upon hers, the grip of his mailed arms. And again she knew the flash of violence that might have been hate or love, and warmth flowed through her again in a sustaining tide.

And she fought. All the deeps of warmth and humanity in her she drew upon to fight the cold, all the violence of emotion to combat the terrible apathy which had gripped her once and was stretching out again for her soul.

It was not an easy victory. There were moments when the chill all but conquered, and moments when she felt herself drawn tenuously out of the congealing body which was hers to reel among the other shadows—a dim thing whose shape hinted at unspeakable possibilities, a shadow with form and depth and no reality. She caught remote beats of the insane harmony they danced to, and though her soul was fainting, her unreal shade went whirling on with the rest. She shared their torment for long minutes together.

But always she pulled herself free again. Always she fought back somehow into the ice-fettered body and shook off the frigid apathy that bound it, and hurled her weapons of life and vitality against the dark god's frosty presence.

And though she knew she would win this time, a little creeping doubt had entered her mind and would not be ousted. She could beat the god off, but she could never destroy him. He would always return. She dared not destroy him—a vision of her thought-picture came back to her, of the tiny life-spark burning against eternal darkness. And though if there were no light there could be no dark, yet it was true in reverse too, and if the power upon which the black god drew were destroyed—if the dark were dissipated, then there would be no light. No life. Interdependence, and eternal struggle. . . .

All this she was realizing with a remote part of herself as she fought. She realized it very vaguely, for her mind had not been trained to such abstractions. With her conscious self she was calling up the memories of love and hate and terror, the exultation of battle, the exaltation of joy. Everything that was alive and pulsing and warm she flung against the black god's chill, feeling her thoughts

rise up in a protecting wall about her, to shut out all menace.

Victory, as before, came very suddenly. Without warning a blaze of light sprang up around her. The dark presence melted into oblivion. In that abrupt glare she closed her dazzled eyes, and when she opened them again familiar moonlight was flooding the glen. The fluid dark had vanished, the shadows no longer danced. That light had blasted them out of existence, and as it died she stared round the dim ravine with startled eyes, searching for the thing that was all she had seen of Guillaume. It was gone with the rest. The tangible dark which had brimmed the place was utterly gone. Not a shadow moved anywhere. But on the wind that was blowing down the ravine a small voice wailed.

And so again the weary chase went on. But she had less than ever to guide her now—only a fitful crying in the dark. "Jirel—" it wailed, "Jirel—Jirel—" and by that calling she followed. She could see nothing. Guillaume was no more than a voice now, and she could follow him by ear alone. Emptily the landscape stretched before her.

She had come out of the ravine's end upon a broad fan-shaped slope which tilted downward into darkness. Water was falling somewhere near, but she could not see it. She ran blindly, ears strained for the small wailing cry. It led out over the slope and skirted the foot of a hill and passed by the place where water fell in a thin cascade down a cliff-side, and whispered evilly to itself as it fell.

The sound obscured the sound she followed, and when she had passed beyond the whisper of the falls she had to stop and listen for a long time, while her heart thudded and the land around her crept with small, inexplicable noises, before she caught the far-away wail, "Jirel—Jirel——"

She set off in the direction from which the sound came, and presently heard it again more clearly, "Jirel! Jirel, my murderess!"

It was a heart-breaking course she ran, with no more than a fitful wailing to guide her and unknown perils lurking all about in the dark, and her own body and soul so drained of all strength by that second struggle with the god that the misty darkness wavered before her eyes and the ground underfoot heaved up to meet her time after time.

Once she fell, and lay still for a second to catch her struggling breath. But it seemed to her that the ground against her body was too warm, somehow, and moving gently as if with leisured breathing. So she leaped up again in swift alarm, and went skimming on with that dream-like speed over the dark grass.

It seemed to her that, as the shadow she had pursued had fled through shadowy places where she all but lost it time and again, now the fleeing voice led her through noisy places where she could scarcely hear it above the talking of brooks and the rush of falls and the blowing of the wind. She heard sounds she had never heard before—small, tenuous voices murmuring in the wind, the whispering of grass saying things in a murmurous language, the squeak of insects brushing past her face and somehow almost articulate. She had heard no birds here, though once a great, dark, shapeless thing flapped heavily through the air a little distance ahead. But there were frog voices from the swamps she skirted, and hearing these she remembered what she had met in another swamp on her first visit here, and a little chill went down her back.

In every sound she heard ran the

thread of evil inextricably tangled with a thread of purest despair—a human despair even through the grasses' rustling and in the murmur of the wind—voices wailing so hopelessly that more than once tears started unbidden to her eyes, but so indistinctly that she could never be sure she had heard. And always through the wailing rippled the chuckle of dim evils without any names in human languages. And with all these sounds she heard many others that meant nothing to her and upon whose origins she dared not speculate.

Through this welter of incomprehensible noises she followed the one far crying that had meaning for her. It led in a long arc across rolling ground, over muttering brooks that talked morbidly in the dark. Presently she began to catch faint strains of the most curious music. It did not have the quality of composition, or even unity, but seemed to consist of single groups of notes, like sprays of music, each unrelated to the rest, as if thousands of invisible creatures were piping tiny, primitive tunes, every one deaf to the songs of his fellows. The sound grew louder as she advanced, and she saw that she was coming to a luminous patch upon the dark ground. When she reached the edge she paused in wonder.

The music was rising from the earth, and it rose visibly. She could actually see the separate strains wavering upward through the still air. She could never have described what she saw, for the look of that visible music was beyond any human words. Palely the notes rose, each singing its tiny, simple tune. There seemed to be no discords, for all the non-unity of the sounds. She had the mad fancy that the music was growing—that if she wished she could wade through the ranks of it and gather great sheaves of sound—perhaps bouquets which, if they were carefully selected, would join together and play a single complex melody.

But it was not music she dared listen to long. There was in it the queerest little gibbering noise, and as she lingered that sound intensified and ran through her brain in small, giggling undernotes, and she caught herself laughing senselessly at nothing at all. Then she took fright, and listened for the voice that was Guillaume. And terrifyingly she heard it strongly in the very midst of the little mad jinglings. It deepened and grew, and drowned out the smaller sounds, and the whole field was one vast roar of insane laughter that thundered through her head in destroying waves—a jarring laughter that threatened to shake her very brain into a jelly, and shivered through her body irresistibly and wrung tears from her eyes even as she laughed.

"Guillaume!" she called again in the midst of her agony. "Oh Guillaume!" and at the sound of her voice all laughter ceased and a vast, breathless silence fell upon the whole dark world. Through that silence the tiniest wail threaded itself reedily, "Jirel——" Then other sounds came back to life, and the wind blew and the wail diminished in the distance. Again the chase went on.

By now the moon's dead, crawling face had sunk nearly to the horizon, and the shadows lay in long patterns across the ground. It seemed to her that around the broad ring of the sky a pallor was rising. In her weariness and despair she did not greatly care now, knowing though she did that should day catch her here it meant a death more terrible than any man can die on earth, and an eternity, perhaps, of torment in one of the many shapes she had seen and recognized as the spirits of the damned. Perhaps a writhing tree—or imprisonment in an obscenely revelatory image, like Guillaume—or no more than a

wailing along the wind for ever. She was too tired to care. She stumbled on hopelessly, hearing the voice that cried her name grow fainter and fainter in the distance.

THE end of the chase came very suddenly. She reached a stream that flowed smoothly under the arch of a low, dark bridge, and crossed over it, seeing her face look up at her from the water with a wild mouthing of soundless cries, though her own lips were closed. She met her reflected eyes and read warning and despair and the acutest agony in their depths, and saw her own face writhing all out of familiarity with anguish and hopelessness. It was a frightful vision, but she scarcely saw it, and ran on without heeding the image in the water or the landscape around her or even the broadening dawn around the horizon.

Then close ahead of her sounded the thin small voice she followed, and she woke out of her stupor and stared around. That bridge had not ended upon the far side of the brook, but somehow had arched up its sides and broadened its floor and become a dark temple around whose walls ran a more bestial sculpture than anything imagined even in dreams. Here in this carved and columned building was the epitome of the whole dim hell through which she had been running. Here in these sculptures she read all the hideous things the shadows had hinted at, all the human sorrow and despair and hopelessness she had heard in the wind's crying, all the chuckling evil that the water spoke. In the carvings she could trace the prisoned souls of men and beasts, tormented in many ways, some of which she had already seen, but many that she had not, and which she mercifully could not understand. It was not clear for what they were punished, save that the torture was tinged just enough with justice so that it seemed the more hideously unjust in its exaggerations. She closed her eyes and stood swaying a little, feeling the triumphant evil of the temple pulsing around her, too stunned and sick even to wonder what might come next.

Then the small voice was beating around her head. Almost she felt the desperate hammering of wings, as if some little, frantic bird were flying against her face. "Jirel!—Jirel!" it cried in the purest agony, over and over, a final, wild appeal. And she did not know what to do. Helplessly she stood there, feeling it beating round her head, feeling the temple's obscene triumph surging through her.

And without warning, for the third time the black god's presence folded like a cloak about her. Almost she welcomed it. Here was something she knew how to fight. As from a long distance away she heard the small voice crying in diminishing echoes, and the frigid twilight was forming about her, and the gray ice thickened upon her soul. She called up the memories of hate and love and anger to hurl against it, thinking as she did so that perhaps one who had lived less violently than herself and had lesser stores of passions to recall might never be able to combat the god's death-chill. She remembered laughter, and singing and gayety—she remembered slaughter and blood and the wild clang of mail—she remembered kisses in the dark, and the hard grip of men's arms about her body.

But she was weary, and the dawn was breaking terribly along the sky, and the dark god's power was rooted in a changeless oblivion that never faltered. And she began to realize failure. The memories she flung out had no power against the gray pall of that twilight place wherein he dwelt, and she knew the first seeping

of the iron despair through her brain. Gradually the will to struggle congealed with her congealing body, until she was no longer a warm, vital thing of flesh and blood, but something rigid and ice-bound, dwelling bodilessly in the twilight.

There was one small spark of her that the god could not freeze. She felt him assailing it. She felt him driving it out of the cold thing that had been her body —drawing it forth irresistibly—she was a thin, small crying in the dark. . . . Helplessly she felt herself whirling to and fro upon currents she had never felt before, and dashing against unseen obstacles, wailing wordlessly. She had no substance, and the world had faded from around her. She was aware of other things—dim, vague, like beating pulses, that were whirling through the dark, small lost things like herself, bodiless and unprotected, buffeted by every current that blew; little wailing things, shrieking through the night.

Then one of the small vaguenesses blew against her and through her, and in the instant of its passage she caught the faint vibration of her name, and knew that this was the voice that had summoned her out of her dreams, the voice she had pursued: Guillaume. And with that instant's union something as sustaining as life itself flashed through her wonderfully, a bright spark that swelled and grew and blazed, and——

She was back again in her body amidst the bestial carvings of the temple—a thawing, warming body from which the shackles of icy silence were falling, and that hot blaze was swelling still, until all of her being was suffused and pulsing with it, and the frigid pall of dark melted away unresistingly before the hot, triumphant blaze that dwelt within her.

IN HER ecstasy of overwhelming warmth she scarcely realized her victory. She did not greatly care. Something very splendid was happening. . . .

Then the air trembled, and all about her small, thin sounds went shivering upward, as if ribbons of high screams were rippling past her across a background of silence. The blaze within her faded slowly, paled, imperceptibly died away, and the peace of utter emptiness flooded into her soul. She turned wearily backward across the bridge. Behind her the temple stood in a death-like quiet. The evil that had beat in long pulses through it was stilled for a while by something stunningly splendid which had no place in the starry hell; something human and alive, something compounded of love and longing, near-despair and sacrifice and triumph.

Jirel did not realize how great a silence she left behind, nor very clearly what she had done. Above her against the paling sky she saw a familiar hilltop, and dimly knew that in all her long night of running she had been circling round toward her starting-place. She was too numb to care. She was beyond relief or surprize.

She began the climb passionlessly, with no triumph in the victory she knew was hers at last. For she had driven Guillaume out of the image and into the shadow, and out of the shadow into the voice, and out of the voice into—clean death, perhaps. She did not know. But he had found peace, for his insistences no longer beat upon her consciousness. And she was content.

Above her the cave mouth yawned. She toiled up the slope, dragging her sword listlessly, weary to the very soul, but quite calm now, with a peace beyond all understanding.

"Suddenly a heavy weight came down on his body and sharp teeth bit into his aching wound."

The Graveyard Duchess

By JOHN FLANDERS

The tale of a ghastly horror that stalked at night through the cemetery—a blood-chilling story of the Undead

YOU want to know why I took the job at the cemetery, Judge? I took it for two reasons: I was hungry, and I was cold.

Picture a man with a summer suit on, a man who had walked sixty kilometers, from a town where he had been unable to find any sort of work, to a town that was his last hope. Imagine him living on frozen carrots smelling of manure and hard green apples picked up off the ground in an abandoned orchard. Imagine him soaked in an October rain, numb from the gusts of north wind, and you will have an idea of the sort of fellow I was when I got into the suburbs of that horrible town.

I sneaked into the first building I came to. It happened to be the Tavern of the Two Plovers. The kind-hearted innkeeper gave me a cup of hot coffee, a slice of bread and a pickled herring, and

when I spoke about the shape I was in, he told me that one of the cemetery keepers at Saint-Guitton had just left and that they were looking for somebody to take his place.

I saw no reason why I should be afraid of the corpses. It was the living that had made my life a burden for me. So I was perfectly happy when the two keepers in charge, who seemed to have entire control of the cemetery, accepted me.

They fitted me out with a suit of warm clothes, and they gave me a feed. Ah, what a feed that was! Great slices of red roast, a meat-pie dripping juice, a stack of golden pancakes. . . .

The cemetery of Saint-Guitton is an immense necropolis where no one has been buried for twenty years. The headstones are dilapidated and the inscriptions on them are eaten by lichens and rain. There are monuments that have fallen in ruins. There are others that have sunk into the ground and are half out of sight. There is a sort of faded brush growing all over the paths, and the burial lots themselves are a jungle.

The city is poor, and when they opened the new Western Cemetery they conceived a plan for cutting the old one up into building-sites for factories and that sort of thing.

But the manufacturers were not interested. They had no doubt heard some of the stories that the people who live out that way tell each other when they sit in front of their coke fires and listen to the wind as it whines in the yew-trees over in Saint-Guitton — stories that would make your hair stand on end.

Eight years ago, something happened.

The wealthy Duchess Opoltchenska—Russian or Bulgarian, she was—made an offer to the city to buy the abandoned cemetery for a fantastic price, on condition that she could build a mausoleum for herself there and that she should be the last person who should ever be buried there. She explained her plan for having the cemetery guarded night and day by three keepers. Two of them were to be two of her old servants; the third would be employed and supervised by these two.

The city was poor, as I said, and the officials jumped at the chance. A little army of workmen were put on the job at once, and built in the farthest corner from the road a great tomb that looked like a palace. The cemetery wall was built up to three times its former height, and was topped with iron spikes.

THE mausoleum was scarcely more than finished in time to receive the body of the Duchess. Nobody thought of the arrangement as anything but the harmless fancy of an old woman with money. It was reported that she had jewelry of enormous value buried with her, and it all looked like a careful plan to keep the grave-robbers away.

Now for my part in it all:

The two keepers were very good to me. They were two big fellows, built like two bulldogs. But they must have had good hearts, for I could see how delighted they were at my robust appetite, and surely a couple of men who grin when a poor hobo takes his food well must be a good-natured sort.

When I went to work, I had to take an oath to keep certain rules strictly. I was never to leave the cemetery during the year of service I had signed up for; I was to have no dealings with the outside; and I was never to go near the Duchess's mausoleum.

Velitcho, whose special business was to guard that corner of the cemetery, informed me that his instructions were to shoot at anybody who came in the neighborhood of the tomb. When he told me

that, he pointed his gun carelessly at a poplar branch in the distance, on which a tiny hopping shadow was just visible. When he pulled the trigger a blue-jay tumbled to the ground.

Velitcho was a good shot. He had plenty of practise. The cemetery was swarming with wild rabbits, with great opalescent pigeons, and even with pheasants in the densest thickets.

Ossip, the other keeper, was the only one of us who ever left the cemetery. He looked after the commissary department, and he was extremely good at cooking savory dishes of game. I shall never forget a galantine of fowl he used to concoct, caked in a golden jelly. Ah, it would melt in your mouth! . . .

I had nothing particular to do but eat and stroll about the melancholy place.

Velitcho had lent me a gun, but I was a poor marksman, and my marksmanship usually accomplished nothing but awaken an echo which would wander for a few seconds like a melancholy lament among the forgotten tombs.

In the evening we came together in a little lodge, where we sat and watched the malicious twinkling of our stove's one mica eye. Outside, there was only wind and darkness.

Ossip and Velitcho rarely spoke. They would sit with their eyes fixed on the one tall black window. They seemed to be constantly listening, and their great canine faces always showed a trace of uneasiness.

I wondered at them. I was inclined to smile at the superstitious turn of their childish minds, and I looked at them with a touch of condescension. What was there to be afraid of? There was nothing outside but the darkness of a winter night and the dreary complaining of the wind. Sometimes, away up in the sky, we could hear the cry of some nocturnal bird of prey, and when the moon was visible, small and bright, in the corner of the highest window-pane, I could catch the cracking of the stones in the bitter cold.

Along toward midnight, Ossip always brewed for us a hot drink which he called "chur" or "skur". It was a blackish liquor with an aroma of strange plants, and I drank it with the keenest pleasure. By the time I had swallowed the last drop, an exquisite feeling of warmth ran all over my body. I was perfectly happy. I wanted to laugh and prattle, to call for a second cup, but I was never able to get that far; for all at once a wheel of many colors would begin to turn before my eyes, and I would have just time to tumble over on my cot and fall sound asleep.

There was nothing to be afraid of at night in the cemetery. The one thing that bothered me was the monotony of the days, and that is why I began keeping a diary, or more strictly a book of impressions. I kept no record of day or date.

If you will allow me, Your Honor, I will read some pages from this note-book of mine.

* * * * *

Ossip and Velitcho are spoiling me. I never had such meals in my life. A day or two ago, for some reason or other, I didn't seem to have much appetite, and the two poor fellows were so anxious about me that it was almost ridiculous.

Velitcho accused Ossip of not having cooked the food properly, and he abused the poor giant till I felt ashamed of myself. Since then Ossip is constantly consulting me about what I like best. Poor, big-hearted fellows!

With all this fine eating, I ought to be getting as fat as a quail. But I certainly am not. Now and then it strikes me that I am strangely thin and weak.

YESTERDAY, for the first time since I have been here, a thing happened that frightened me. And I am sure it would have alarmed anybody.

I was strolling about in the twilight, when all of a sudden a frightful scream burst out from somewhere. I thought I saw Velitcho run out of the lodge and dash into the thicket.

When I reached the lodge, I saw Ossip standing with his eyes on the darkening jungle. When I asked him what had happened, he said that Velitcho had been in pursuit of a curlew. The next day Velitcho brought me one that he had killed.

It was a strange little creature with an immense beak as long as a dagger. But why had they made such a fuss over this poor little bird?

I laughed as I felt of its ash-colored plumage, but I knew my laugh rang false, and I haven't recovered from the shock yet.

I CERTAINLY am not as well as I ought to be, although I am eating like a wolf and Ossip is outdoing himself. In the morning, there is still a strange sort of torpor over me, and I can hardly drag myself out of bed, even when the sun beats on the window and I can hear the cracking of Velitcho's gun and the rattling of Ossip's pots and pans.

I have begun to notice a dull pain behind my left ear. When I look closely in the mirror, I can see a little wound back there, and the flesh is red all around it. It is scarcely more than a scratch, but it hurts me a good deal. . . .

Today, as I was beating the bush in the hope of scaring up a pigeon or a woodcock, I saw something move in the branches near me. It was a splendid cock pheasant, thrusting his delicate head out between two twigs. It was a wonderful chance. I fired, and the wounded bird struggled away with one wing drooping.

I rushed excitedly after him, and a long pursuit began. All of a sudden I stopped and let my prey escape me. I had heard someone. It was a hoarse, plaintive voice, speaking in a foreign tongue, words that sounded infinitely sad and almost like an entreaty.

I looked out from my bushes, and behind a massive wall of cypress and spruce I saw the outlines of a gloomy building. It was the tomb of the Duchess.

I was on forbidden ground.

Velitcho had given me a warning I was not likely to forget. I got out of there in a hurry, just in time to see this same Velitcho emerge from the wood, bare-headed and pale as death.

When I glanced at him in the evening, I noticed a long livid scar across his right cheek. It seemed that he was trying hard to keep me from seeing it.

IT IS nearly midnight. My two companions are throwing dice. All of a sudden my heart stops beating. Right beside the house, only a few steps away, I hear a curlew cry.

What a frightful noise the thing makes! It sounds as if the whole Saint-Guitton cemetery screamed in terror.

Velitcho has frozen into a statue, the leather dice-box in his fingers. Ossip, with a muffled cry, runs to the dish in which the chur is heating. He fairly pushes the cup into my hands, and I can see that his hands are trembling.

OH, HOW terrible I feel this morning! The red swollen wound behind my ear is larger. In the center, it is bleeding a little.

I'm sick—I'm sick.

YESTERDAY I explored the inside of the wall on the east side of the cemetery. It is an uncanny region, and I had never ventured that far before.

I discovered a tall hedge of holly bushes cutting across from the east wall to the north wall, and shutting in a triangular space which the hedge concealed from my sight.

What strange presentiment was it that drove me to examine this mysterious enclosure? It was not easy to get into it, for the hedge was thick and every holly leaf was a little clawing hand that lacerated my skin. There was nothing in the enclosure; that is, nothing but eight crosses which seemed to be standing in the order of their age, so that the first one was rotted and discolored by the rain, while the last one was fresh and bright. . . . These certainly were not old graves. . . .

Last night my sleep was haunted by nightmares. I felt as if an enormous weight were crushing my chest, and the wound behind my ear hurt atrociously.

I'm afraid. . . .

There is something wrong. How does it happen that I didn't notice it before?

Neither Ossip nor Velitcho touches the chur. This morning they forgot to put away the three cups. The three stood on the table together, but only mine had had the liquid in it. The others were perfectly clean.

THIS evening I tried to keep awake and see if I could learn anything. I drank the chur. I lay down on my cot, I struggled against the drowsiness, I resisted it with all my strength and all my brain. Ah, it was terrible!

I saw Ossip and Velitcho watch me. They thought I had lost consciousness. With a mighty effort I kept my senses for a second. And I heard the frightful curlew shriek by the window.

Then something horrible happened. I caught a glimpse of a face against the window. It had glassy eyes, like a corpse's, white hair that stood on end like quills, and a grimacing mouth with black teeth, a mouth like fire or fresh blood. Then the fiery wheel turned in my head and I lost consciousness. And the nightmare came.

I DRANK the chur. I drank it every evening. They watch me like tigers and I know that something ghastly happens every night. What? I can't tell, I can't think any more. All I can do is suffer. . . .

What mysterious force is it that draws me back to look at the crosses again?

When I was just starting to come away, my eye fell on a scrap of wood just visible above the earth beside the eighth cross. I drew the little board out of the ground. I could see that something had been painfully written on it.

It was difficult to decipher, but I figured it out. It ran:

> Friend, if you can't get out of here, this is where you will be buried. They have killed seven already. I shall be the eighth, for I have no strength left. I don't know what is going on; it is a horrible mystery. Get out!
>
> PIERRE BRUNEN.

Pierre Brunen! I remember having heard that that was the name of my predecessor. The eight crosses marked the tombs of the keepers' helpers for the past eight years. . . .

I tried to escape. I climbed the north wall at a place where I had found some rough places that I could get my feet into.

I had almost reached the spikes at the top, when a stone broke loose two inches from my hand, then another, then a third. At the foot of the wall I saw Velitcho coldly pointing his gun at me, and his eyes had the icy glint of metal—of the metal they cast into bells to toll when men die.

I HAVE been back at the triangular enclosure where the tombs are. Beside Brunen's they have dug a fresh grave.

Oh, I must get away! Cold and hunger along the cruel highway—anything rather than this mystery and this horror.

But they have me in their grip; they watch me day and night. . . .

I have made a discovery. Perhaps it will save me. Ossip pours something into the chur from a black bottle.

Where does he keep the bottle?

I HAVE found the bottle. There is a colorless liquid in it, with a sweet odor.

I will do something this evening. . . .

I have done it. I have poured the stuff into their tea. . . .

Will they notice it? Oh, how my heart beats!

They are drinking it! There is hope. . . .

Ossip fell asleep first. Velitcho turned and looked at me in astonishment; then a ferocious light came into his eyes and he reached for his revolver. But he never got his hand on it. He fell forward on the table, sound asleep.

I found Ossip's keys, but as I was opening the heavy gate of the cemetery the thought came to me that my task was not finished. I still had an enigma to solve and eight deaths to avenge. And as long as those fellows were alive, I should have them on my trail.

I went back. I took Velitcho's revolver, set the muzzle against one head after the other, at the place where I have the little red wound that pains me. I pulled the trigger twice. . . .

Neither one of them moved. No, Ossip did quiver once. And alone with the two corpses, I awaited the mystery of midnight.

I had put the three cups on the table, just as Ossip set them there every evening. I put the keepers' caps on their heads so as to cover the red marks. If you had looked in at the window, you would have supposed that the two were asleep.

Then I sat and waited. Oh, how slowly the hands of the clock crawled around toward midnight, the hour for Ossip's chur! The blood of the dead men dripped to the floor, drop after drop. It made a gentle little sound like the dripping of the rain from the leaves of the trees in the springtime.

All at once the curlew cried. . . .

I lay down on my cot, and held myself perfectly still, as if I were asleep. The curlew cried again, nearer than the first time. Something was scratching against the window-pane.

Silence.

The door opened, very softly. Someone or something had entered the room. A sickening odor, like the smell of a corpse.

I could hear stealthy steps approaching my cot. Then suddenly a heavy weight came down on my body. Sharp teeth bit into my aching wound, and disgusting icy lips sucked gluttonously at my blood.

I cried out and struggled to my feet. And a hideous cry answered mine.

What I saw was so frightful that it took all my strength to keep my feet. Two paces away from me, the same nightmare face that I had seen once at the window fixes me with its eyes of flame, and from its lips trickles a stream of red blood, *my blood!*

The Duchess Opoltchenska, fiendish vampire, has prolonged her foul life by

sucking the young blood of the eight wretched keepers.

Her stupor lasted only a second. With a bound she was on me, and her claws sank into my neck.

I had clung to my revolver. I fired, and with one great belching hiccup, which spattered the walls with black blood, the vampire sank to the floor. . . .

* * * * *

And that, Your Honor, is why you will find beside the bodies of Velitcho and Ossip the body of the Duchess Opoltchenska, officially deceased eight years ago and buried at that time in the cemetery of Saint-Guitton.

Solitude

By RODERIC PAPINEAU

I often think when I am sole alone
That solitude is never possible,
That ghosts of dead departed ever haunt
The quiet places where I lie alone;
I think that every nook and cranny hides
The spirit personality of Jones,
Or Smith, or Wood, or Harry Robinson,
Who always wore his hat that funny way
And used to dive in somersaults and screws,
The finest swimmer in the Middle West—
He died of cancer, killed by strain of war;
Yes, he, and Charlie, too, surround me now,
And Tommy Perkins with his squinting grin;
If I stay here or move to over there,
They still do follow: never can I tear
Myself away from those who once did live
But now are dead. Perhaps I, too, will die;
Yes, that's the ticket! I will join my friends;
And Jones and Smith and Wood and Robinson
And Charlie, too, and Tommy Perkins with
His squinting grin, will haunt together now.

Xeethra

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A strange weird tale, exquisitely told, about a goatherd who had been king in the olden days, and how he regained and lost again his kingship

Subtle and manifold are the nets of the Demon, who followeth his chosen from birth to death and from death to birth, throughout many lives.
—The Testaments of Carnamagos.

LONG had the wasting summer pastured its suns, like fiery red stallions, on the dun hills that crouched before the Mykrasian Mountains in wild easternmost Cincor. The peak-fed torrents were become tenuous threads or far-sundered, fallen pools; the granite boulders were shaled by the heat; the bare earth was cracked and creviced; and the low, meager grasses were seared even to the roots.

So it occurred that the boy Xeethra, tending the black and piebald goats of his uncle Pornos, was obliged to follow his charges farther each day on the combes and hilltops. In an afternoon of late summer he came to a deep, craggy valley which he had never before visited. Here a cool and shadowy tarn was watered by hidden well-springs; and the ledgy slopes about the tarn were mantled with herbage and bushes that had not wholly lost their vernal greenness.

Surprized and enchanted, the young goatherd followed his capering flock into this sheltered paradise. There was small likelihood that the goats of Pornos would stray afield from such goodly pasturage; so Xeethra did not trouble himself to watch them any longer. Entranced by his surroundings, he began to explore the valley, after quenching his thirst at the clear waters that sparkled like golden wine.

To him, the place seemed a veritable garden-pleasance. Forgetting the distance he had already come, and the wrath of Pornos if the flock should return late for the milking, he wandered deeper among the winding crags that protected the valley. On every hand the rocks grew sterner and wilder; the valley straitened; and he stood presently at its end, where a rugged wall forbade further progress.

Feeling a vague disappointment, he was about to turn and retrace his wanderings. Then, in the base of the sheer wall, he perceived the mysterious yawning of a cavern. It seemed that the rock must have opened only a little while before his coming: for the lines of cleavage were clearly marked, and the cracks made in the surrounding surface were unclaimed by the moss that grew plentifully elsewhere. From the cavern's creviced lip there sprang a stunted tree, with its newly broken roots hanging in air; and the stubborn taproot was in the rock at Xeethra's feet, where, it was plain, the tree had formerly stood.

Wondering and curious, the boy peered into the inviting gloom of the cavern, from which, unaccountably, a soft balmy air now began to blow. There were strange odors on the air, suggesting the pungency of temple incense, the languor and luxury of opiate blossoms. They disturbed the senses of Xeethra; and, at the same time, they seduced him with their promise of unbeholden marvelous things. Hesitating, he tried to remember certain

"Two beings of colossal stature stood waist-high above the near tree-tops."

legends that Pornos had told him: legends that concerned such hidden caverns as the one on which he had stumbled. But it seemed that the tales had faded now from his mind, leaving only a dim sense of things that were perilous, forbidden, and magical. He thought that the cavern was the portal of some undiscovered world—and the portal had opened expressly to permit his entrance. Being of a nature both venturesome and visionary, he was undeterred by the fears that others might have felt in his place. Overpowered by a great curiosity, he soon entered the cave, carrying for a torch a dry, resinous bough that had fallen from the tree in the cliff.

Beyond the mouth he was swallowed by a rough-arched passage that pitched downward like the gorge of some monstrous dragon. The torch's flame blew back, flaring and smoking in the warm aromatic wind that strengthened from unknown depths. The cave steepened perilously; but Xeethra continued his exploration, climbing down by the stair-like coigns and projections of the stone.

Like a dreamer in a dream, he was wholly absorbed by the mystery on which he had happened; and at no time did he recall his abandoned duty. He lost all reckoning of the time consumed in his descent. Then, suddenly, his torch was extinguished by a hot gust that blew upon him like the expelled breath of some prankish demon.

Feeling the assailment of a black panic, he tottered in darkness and sought to secure his footing on the dangerous incline. But, ere he could relume the blown-out torch, he saw that the night

around him was not complete, but was tempered by a wan, golden glimmering from the depths below. Forgetting his alarm in a new wonder, he descended toward the mysterious light.

At the bottom of the long incline, Xeethra passed through a low cavern-mouth and emerged into sun-bright radiance. Dazzled and bewildered, he thought for a moment that his subterranean wanderings had brought him back to the outer air in some unsuspected land lying among the Mykrasian hills. Yet surely the region before him was no part of summer-stricken Cincor: for he saw neither hills nor mountains nor the black sapphire heaven from which the aging but despotic sun glared down with implacable drouth on the kingdoms of Zothique.

He stood on the threshold of a fertile plain that lapsed illimitably into golden distance under the measureless arch of a golden vault. Far off, through the misty radiance, there was a dim towering of unidentifiable masses that might have been spires and domes and ramparts. A level meadow lay at his feet, covered with close-grown curling sward that had the greenness of verdigris; and the sward, at intervals, was studded with strange blossoms appearing to turn and move like living eyes. Near at hand, beyond the meadow, was an orchard-like grove of tall, amply spreading trees amid whose lush leafage he descried the burning of numberless dark-red fruits. The plain, to all seeming, was empty of human life; and no birds flew in the fiery air or perched on the laden boughs. There was no sound other than the sighing of leaves: a sound like the hissing of many small hidden serpents.

To the boy from the parched hill-country, this realm was an Eden of untasted delights. But, for a little, he was stayed by the strangeness of it all, and by the sense of weird and preternatural vitality which informed the whole landscape. Flakes of fire appeared to descend and melt in the rippling air; the grasses coiled with verminous writhings; the flowery eyes returned his regard intently; the trees palpitated as if a sanguine ichor flowed within them in lieu of sap; and the undernote of adder-like hissings amid the foliage grew louder and sharper.

Xeethra, however, was deterred only by the thought that a region so fair and fertile must belong to some jealous owner who would resent his intrusion. He scanned the unpeopled plain with much circumspection. Then, deeming himself secure from observation, he yielded to the craving that had been roused within him by the red, luxuriant fruit.

The turf was elastic beneath him, like a living substance, as he ran forward to the nearest trees. Bowed with their shining globes, the branches drooped around him. He plucked several of the largest fruits and stored them thriftily in the bosom of his threadbare tunic. Then, unable to resist his appetence any longer, he began to devour one of the fruits. The rind broke easily under his teeth, and it semed that a royal wine, sweet and puissant, was poured into his mouth from an overbrimming cup. He felt in his throat and bosom a swift warmth that almost suffocated him; and a strange fever sang in his ears and wildered his senses. It passed quickly, and he was startled from his bemusement by the sound of voices falling as if from an airy height.

He knew instantly that the voices were not those of men. They filled his ears with a rolling as of baleful drums, heavy with ominous echoes; yet it seemed that they spoke in articulate words, albeit of a

strange language. Looking up between the thick boughs, he beheld a sight that inspired him with terror. Two beings of colossean stature, tall as the watch-towers of the mountain people, stood waist-high above the near tree-tops. It was as if they had appeared by sorcery from the green ground or the gold heavens: for surely the clumps of vegetation, dwarfed into bushes by their bulk, could never have concealed them from Xeethra's discernment.

The figures were clad in black armor, lusterless and gloomy, such as demons might wear in the service of Thasaidon, lord of the bottomless underworlds. Xeethra felt sure that they had seen him; and perhaps their unintelligible converse concerned his presence. He trembled, thinking now that he had trespassed on the gardens of genii. Peering fearfully from his covert, he could discern no features beneath the frontlets of the dark helms that were bowed toward him: but eye-like spots of yellowish-red fire, restless as marsh-lights, shifted to and fro in void shadow where the faces should have been.

It seemed to Xeethra that the rich foliage could afford no shelter from the scrutiny of these beings, the guardians of the land on which he had so rashly intruded. He was overwhelmed by a consciousness of guilt: the sibilant leaves, the drum-like voices of the giants, the eye-shaped flowers—all appeared to accuse him of trespass and thievery. At the same time he was perplexed by a queer and unwonted vagueness in regard to his own identity: somehow it was not Xeethra the goatherd . . . but another . . . who had found the bright garden-realm and had eaten the blood-dark fruit. This alien self was without name or formulable memory; but there was a flickering of confused lights, a murmur of indistinguishable voices, amid the stirred shadows of his mind. Again he felt the weird warmth, the swift-mounting fever, that had followed the devouring of the fruit.

From all this, he was aroused by a livid flash of light that clove downward toward him across the branches. Whether a bolt of levin had issued from the clear vault, or whether one of the armored beings had brandished a great sword, he was never quite sure afterward. The light seared his vision, he recoiled in uncontrollable fright, and found himself running, half blind, across the open turf. Through whirling bolts of color he saw before him, in a sheer, topless cliff, the cavern-mouth through which he had come. Behind him he heard a long rumbling as of summer thunder . . . or the laughter of colossi.

WITHOUT pausing to retrieve the still-burning brand he had left at the entrance, Xeethra plunged incontinently into the dark cave. Through Stygian murk he managed to grope his way upward on the perilous incline. Reeling, stumbling, bruising himself at every turn, he came at last to the outer exit, in the hidden valley behind the hills of Cincor.

To his consternation, twilight had fallen during his absence in the world beyond the cave. Stars crowded above the grim crags that walled the valley; and the skies of burnt-out purple were gored by the sharp horn of an ivory moon. Still fearing the pursuit of the giant guardians, and apprehending also the wrath of his uncle Pornos, Xeethra hastened back to the little tarn, collected his flock, and drove it homeward through the long, gloomy miles.

During that journey, it seemed that a fever burned and died within him at in-

tervals, bringing strange fancies. He forgot his fear of Pornos, forgot, indeed, that he was Xeethra, the humble and disregarded goatherd. He was returning to another abode than the squalid hut of Pornos, built of clay and brushwood. In a high-domed city, gates of burnished metal would open for him, and fiery-colored banners would stream on the perfumed air; and silver trumpets and the voices of blond odalisques and black chamberlains would greet him as king in a thousand-columned hall. The ancient pomp of royalty, familiar as air and light, would surround him, and he, the King Amero, who had newly come to the throne, would rule as his fathers had ruled over all the kingdom of Calyz by the orient sea. Into his capital, on shaggy camels, the fierce southern tribesmen would bring a levy of date-wine and desert sapphires; and galleys from isles beyond the morning would burden his wharves with their semi-annual tribute of spices and strange-dyed fabrics. . . .

Surging and fading like pictures of delirium but lucid as daily memories, the madness came and went; and once again he was the nephew of Pornos, returning belated with the flock.

Like a downward-thrusting blade, the red moon had fixed itself in the somber hills when Xeethra reached the rough wooden pen in which Pornos kept his goats. Even as Xeethra had expected, the old man was waiting at the gate, bearing in one hand a clay lantern and in the other a staff of briar-wood. He began to curse the boy with half-senile vehemence, waving the staff, and threatening to beat him for his tardiness.

Xeethra did not flinch before the staff. Again, in his fancy, he was Amero, the young king of Calyz. Bewildered and astonished, he saw before him by the light of the shaken lantern a foul and rancid-smelling ancient whom he could not remember. Hardly could he understand the speech of Pornos; the man's anger puzzled but did not frighten him; and his nostrils, as if accustomed only to delicate perfumes, were offended by the goatish stench. As if for the first time, he heard the bleating of the tired flock, and gazed in wild surprize at the wattled pen and the hut beyond.

"Is it for this," cried Pornos, "that I have reared my sister's orphan at great expense? Accursed moon-calf! thankless whelp! If you have lost a milch-goat or a single kid, I shall flay you from thigh to shoulder."

DEEMING that the silence of the youth was due to mere obstinacy, Pornos began to beat him with the staff. At the first blow, the bright cloud lifted from Xeethra's mind. Dodging the briarwood with agility, he tried to tell Pornos of the new pasture he had found among the hills. At this the old man suspended his blows and Xeethra went on to tell of the strange cave that had conducted him to an unguessed garden-land. To support his story, he reached within his tunic for the blood-red apples he had stolen; but, to his confoundment, the fruits were gone, and he knew not whether he had lost them in the dark or whether, perhaps, they had vanished by virtue of some indwelling necromancy.

Pornos, interrupting the youth with frequent scoldings, heard him at first with open unbelief. But he grew silent as the youth went on; and when the story was done, he cried out in a trembling voice:

"Ill was this day, for you have wandered among enchantments. Verily, there is no tarn such as you have described amid the hills; nor, at this season, has any herder found such pasturage.

These things were illusion, designed to lead you astray; and the cave, I wot, was no honest cave but an entrance into hell. I have heard my fathers tell that the gardens of Thasaidon, king of the seven underworlds, lie near to the earth's surface in this region; and caves have opened ere this, like a portal, and the sons of men, trespassing unaware on the gardens, have been tempted by the fruit and eaten it. But madness comes thereof and much sorrow and long damnation: for the Demon, they say, forgetting not one stolen apple, will exact his price in the end. Wo! wo! the goat-milk will be soured for a whole moon by the grass of such wizard pasture; and, after all the food and care you have cost me, I must find another stripling to ward the flocks."

Once more, as he listened, the burning cloud returned upon Xeethra.

"Old man, I know you not," he said perplexedly. Then, using soft words of a courtly speech but half intelligible to Pornos: "It would seem that I have gone astray. Prithee, where lies the kingdom of Calyz? I am king thereof, being newly crowned in the high city of Shathair, over which my fathers have ruled for a thousand years."

"Ai! ai!" wailed Pornos. "The boy is daft. These notions have come through the eating of the Demon's apple. Cease your maundering, and help me to milk the goats. You are none other than the child of my sister Askli, who was delivered these nineteen years agone after her husband, Outhoth, had died of a dysentery. Askli lived not long, and I, Pornos, have reared you as a son, and the goats have mothered you."

"I must find my kingdom," persisted Xeethra. "I am lost in darkness, amid uncouth things, and how I have wandered here I can not remember. Old man, I would have you give me food and lodging for the night. In the dawn I shall journey toward Shathair, by the orient main."

PORNOS, shaking and muttering, lifted his clay lantern to the boy's face. It semed that a stranger stood before him, in whose wide and wondering eyes the flame of golden lamps was somehow reflected. There was no wildness in Xeethra's demeanor, but merely a sort of gentle pride and remoteness; and he wore his threadbare tunic with a strange grace. Surely, however, he was demented; for his manner and speech were past understanding. Pornos, mumbling under his breath, but no longer urging the boy to assist him, turned to the milking. . . .

Xeethra woke betimes in the white dawn, and peered with amazement at the mud-plastered walls of the hovel in which he had dwelt since birth. All was alien and baffling to him; and especially was he troubled by his rough garments and by the sun-swart tawniness of his skin: for such were hardly proper to the young king Amero, whom he believed himself to be. His circumstances were wholly inexplicable; and he felt an urgency to depart at once on his homeward journey.

He rose quietly from the litter of dry grasses that had served him for a bed. Pornos, lying in a far corner, still slept the sleep of age and senescence; and Xeethra was careful not to awaken him. He was both puzzled and repelled by this unsavory ancient, who had fed him on the previous evening with coarse millet-bread and the strong milk and cheese of goats, and had given him the hospitality of a fetid hut. He had paid little heed to the mumblings and objurgations of Pornos; but it was plain that the old man doubted his claims to royal rank, and, moreover, was possessed of peculiar delusions regarding his identity.

Leaving the hovel, Xeethra followed an eastward-winding footpath amid the stony hills. He knew not whither the path would lead: but reasoned that Calyz, being the easternmost realm of the continent Zothique, was situated somewhere below the rising sun. Before him, in vision, the verdant vales of his kingdom hovered like a fair mirage, and the swelling domes of Shathair were as morning cumuli piled in the orient. These things, he deemed, were memories of yesterday. He could not recall the circumstances of his departure and his absence; but surely the land over which he ruled was not remote.

The path turned among lessening ridges, and Xeethra came to the small village of Cith, to whose inhabitants he was known. The place was alien to him now, seeming no more than a cirque of filthy hovels that reeked and festered under the sun. The people gathered about him, calling him by name, and staring and laughing oafishly when he inquired the road to Calyz. No one, it appeared, had ever heard of this kingdom or of the city of Shathair. Noting a strangeness in Xeethra's demeanor, and deeming that his queries were those of a madman, the people began to mock him. Children pelted him with dry clods and pebbles; and thus he was driven from Cith, following an eastern road that ran from Cincor into the neighboring lowlands of the country of Zhel.

Sustained only by the vision of his lost kingdom, the youth wandered for many moons throughout Zothique. People derided him when he spoke of his kingship and made inquiry concerning Calyz; but many, thinking madness a sacred thing, offered him shelter and sustenance. Amid the far-stretching fruitful vineyards of Zhel, and into Istanam of the myriad cities; over the high passes of Ymorth, where snow tarried at the autumn's beginning; and across the salt-pale desert of Dhir, Xeethra followed that bright imperial dream which had now become his only memory. Always eastward he went, traveling sometimes with caravans whose members hoped that a madman's company would bring them good fortune; but oftener he went as a solitary wayfarer.

At whiles, for a brief space, his dream deserted him, and he was only the simple goatherd, lost in foreign realms, and homesick for the barren hills of Cincor. Then, once more, he remembered his kingship, and the opulent gardens of Shathair and the proud palaces, and the names and faces of them that had served him following the death of his father, King Eldamaque, and his own succession to the throne.

AT MIDWINTER, in the far city of Sha-Karag, Xeethra met certain sellers of amulets from Ustaim, who smiled oddly when he asked if they could direct him to Calyz. Winking among themselves when he spoke of his royal rank, the merchants told him that Calyz was situated several hundred leagues beyond Sha-Karag, below the orient sun.

"Hail, O king," they said with mock ceremony. "Long and merrily may you reign in Shathair."

Very joyful was Xeethra, hearing word of his lost kingdom for the first time, and knowing now that it was more than a dream or a figment of madness. Tarrying no longer in Sha-Karag, he journeyed on with all possible haste. . . .

When the first moon of spring was a frail crescent at eve, he knew that he neared his destination. For Canopus burned high in the eastern heavens, mounting gloriously amid the smaller stars even as he had once seen it from his palace-terrace in Shathair.

His heart leapt with the gladness of homecoming; but much he marveled at the wildness and sterility of the region through which he passed. It seemed that there were no travelers coming and going from Calyz; and he met only a few nomads, who fled at his approach like the creatures of the waste. The highway was overgrown with grasses and cacti, and was rutted only by the winter rains. Beside it, anon, he came to a stone terminus carved in the form of a rampant lion, that had marked the western boundary of Calyz. The lion's features had crumbled away, and his paws and body were lichened, and it seemed that long ages of desolation had gone over him. A chill dismay was born in Xeethra's heart: for only yesteryear, if his memory served him rightly, he had ridden past the lion with his father Eldamaque, hunting hyenas, and had remarked then the newness of the carving.

Now, from the high ridge of the border, he gazed down upon Calyz, which had lain like a long verdant scroll beside the sea. To his wonderment and consternation, the wide fields were sere as if with autumn; the rivers were thin threads that wasted themselves in sand; the hills were gaunt as the ribs of unceremented mummies; and there was no greenery other than the scant herbage which a desert bears in spring. Far off, by the purple main, he thought that he beheld the shining of the marble domes of Shathair; and, fearing that some blight of hostile sorcery had fallen upon his kingdom, he hastened toward the city.

Everywhere, as he wandered heartsick through the vernal day, he found that the desert had established its empire. Void were the fields, unpeopled the villages. The cots had tumbled into midden-like heaps of ruin; and it seemed that a thousand seasons of drouth had withered the fruitful orchards, leaving only a few black and decaying stumps.

In the late afternoon he entered Shathair, which had been the white mistress of the orient sea. The streets and the harbor were alike empty, and silence sat on the broken house-tops and the ruining walls. The great bronze obelisks were greened with antiquity; the massy marmorean temples of the gods of Calyz leaned and slanted to their fall.

Tardily, as one who fears to confirm an expected thing, Xeethra came to the palace of the monarchs. Not as he recalled it, a glory of soaring marble half veiled by flowering almonds and trees of spice and high-pulsing fountains, but in stark dilapidation amid blasted gardens, the palace awaited him, while the brief, illusory rose of sunset faded upon its domes, leaving them wan as mausoleums.

How long the place had lain desolate, he could not know. Confusion filled him, and he was whelmed by utter loss and despair. It seemed that none remained to greet him amid the ruins; but, nearing the portals of the west wing, he saw, as it were, a fluttering of shadows that appeared to detach themselves from the gloom beneath the portico; and certain dubious beings, clothed in rotten tatters, came sidling and crawling before him on the cracked pavement. Pieces of their raiment dropped from them as they moved; and about them was an unnamed horror of filth, of squalor and disease. When they neared him, Xeethra saw that most of them were lacking in some member or feature, and that all were marked by the gnawing of leprosy.

His gorge rose within him and he could not speak. But the lepers hailed him with hoarse cries and hollow croakings, as if deeming him another outcast

who had come to join them in their abode amid the ruins.

"Who are ye that dwell in my palace of Shathair?" he inquired at length. "Behold! I am King Amero, the son of Eldamaque, and I have returned from a far land to resume the throne of Calyz."

At this, a loathsome cackling and tittering arose among the lepers. "We alone are the kings of Calyz," one of them told the youth. "The land has been a desert for centuries, and the city of Shathair has long lain unpeopled save by such as we, who were driven out from other places. Young man, you are welcome to share the realm with us: for another king, more or less, is a small matter here."

Thus, with obscene cachinnations, the lepers jeered at Xeethra and derided him; and he, standing amid the dark fragments of his dream, could find no words to answer them. However, one of the oldest lepers, well-nigh limbless and faceless, shared not in the mirth of his fellows, but seemed to ponder and reflect; and he said at last to Xeethra, in a voice issuing thickly from the black pit of his gaping mouth:

"I have heard something of the history of Calyz, and the names of Amero and Eldamaque are familiar to me. In bygone ages certain of the rulers were named thus; but I know not which of them was the son and which the father. Haply both are now entombed, with the rest of their dynasty, in the deep-lying vaults beneath the palace."

Now, in the graying twilight, other lepers emerged from the shadowy ruin and gathered about Xeethra. Hearing that he laid claim to the kingship of the desert realm, certain of their number went away and returned presently, bearing vessels filled with rank water and moldy victuals, which they proffered to Xeethra, bowing low with a mummery as of chamberlains serving a monarch.

XEETHRA turned from them in loathing, though he was famished and athirst. He fled through the ashen gardens, among the dry fountain-mouths and dusty plots. Behind him he heard the hideous mirth of the lepers; but the sound grew fainter, and it seemed that they did not follow him. Rounding the vast palace in his flight, he met no more of these creatures. The portals of the south wing and the east wing were dark and empty, but he did not care to enter them, knowing that desolation and things worse than desolation were the sole tenants.

Wholly distraught and despairing, he came to the eastern wing and paused in gloom. Dully, and with a sense of dream-like estrangement, he became aware that he stood on that very terrace above the sea, which he had remembered so often during his journey. Bare were the ancient flower beds; the trees had rotted away in their sunken basins; and the great flags of the pavement were runneled and broken. But the veils of twilight were tender upon the ruin; and the sea sighed as of yore under a purple shrouding; and the mighty star Canopus climbed in the east, with the lesser stars still faint around him.

Bitter was the heart of Xeethra, thinking himself a dreamer beguiled by some idle dream. He shrank from the high splendor of Canopus, as if from a flame too bright to bear; but, ere he could turn away, it seemed that a column of shadow, darker than the night and thicker than any cloud, rose upward before him from the terrace and blotted out the effulgent star. Out of the solid stone the shadow grew, towering tall and colossal; and it took on the outlines of a mailed

warrior; and it seemed that the warrior looked down upon Xeethra from a great height with eyes that shone and shifted like fireballs in the darkness of his face under the lowering helmet.

Confusedly, as one who recalls an old dream, Xeethra remembered a boy who had herded goats upon summer-stricken hills; and who, one day, had found a cavern that opened portal-like on a garden-land of strangeness and marvel. Wandering there, the boy had eaten a blood-dark fruit and had fled in terror before the black-armored giants who warded the garden. Again he was that boy; and still he was the king Amero, who had sought for his lost realm through many regions; and, finding it in the end, had found only the abomination of desolation.

Now, as the trepidation of the goatherd, guilty of theft and trespass, warred in his soul with the pride of the king, he heard a voice that rolled through the heavens like thunder from a high cloud in the spring night:

"I am the emissary of Thasaidon, who sends me in due season to all who have passed the nether portals and have tasted the fruit of his garden. No man, having eaten the fruit, shall remain thereafter as he was before; but to some the fruit brings oblivion, and to others, memory. Know, then, that in another birth, ages agone, you were indeed the young king Amero. The memory, being strong upon you, has effaced the remembrance of your present life, and has driven you forth to seek your ancient kingdom."

"If this be true, then doubly am I bereft," said Xeethra, bowing sorrowfully before the shadow. "For, being Amero, I am throneless and realmless; and, being Xeethra, I can not forget my former royalty and regain the content which I knew as a simple goatherd."

"Harken, for there is another way," said the shadow, its voice muted like the murmur of a far ocean. "Thasaidon is the master of all sorceries, and a giver of magic gifts to those who serve him and acknowledge him as their lord. Pledge your allegiance, promise your soul to him; and in fee thereof the Demon will surely reward you. If it be your wish, he can wake again the buried past with his necromancy. Again, as King Amero, you shall reign over Calyz; and all things shall be as they were in the perished years; and the dead faces and the fields now desert shall bloom again."

"I accept the bond," said Xeethra. "I plight my fealty to Thasaidon and I promise my soul to him if he, in return, will give me back my kingdom."

"There is more to be said," resumed the shadow. "Not wholly have you remembered your other life, but merely those years that correspond to your present youth. Living again as Amero, perhaps you will regret your royalty in time; and if such regret should overcome you, leading you to forget a monarch's duty, then the whole necromancy shall end and vanish like vapor."

"So be it," said Xeethra. "This, too, I accept as part of the bargain."

When the words ended, he beheld no longer the shadow towering against Canopus. The star flamed with a pristine splendor, as if no cloud had ever dimmed it; and, without sense of change or transition, he who watched the star was none other than King Amero; and the goatherd Xeethra, and the emissary, and the pledge given to Thasaidon, were as things that had never been. The ruin that had come upon Shathair was no more than the dream of some mad prophet; for in the nostrils of Amero the perfume of languorous flowers mingled with salt sea-balsams; and in his ears the

grave murmur of ocean was pierced by the amorous plaint of lyres and a shrill laughter of slave-girls from the palace behind him. He heard the myriad noises of the nocturnal city, where his people feasted and made jubilee; and, turning from the star with a mystic pain and an obscure joy in his heart, Amero beheld the effulgent portals and windows of his father's house, and the far-mounting light from a thousand flambeaux that paled the stars as they passed over Shathair.

It is written in the old chronicles that King Amero reigned for many prosperous years. Peace and abundance were upon all the realm of Calyz; the drouth came not from the desert, nor violent gales from the main; and tribute was sent at the ordained seasons to Amero from the subject isles and outlying lands. And Amero was well content, dwelling superbly in rich-arrased halls, feasting and drinking royally, and hearing the praise of his lute-players and his chamberlains and his lemans.

When his life was a little past the meridian years, there came at whiles to Amero something of that satiety which lies in wait for the minions of fortune. At such times he turned from the cloying pleasures of the court and found delight in blossoms and leaves and the verses of olden poets. Thus was satiety held at bay; and, since the duties of the realm rested lightly upon him, Amero still found his kingship a goodly thing.

Then, in a latter autumn, it seemed that the stars looked disastrously upon Calyz. Murrain and blight and pestilence rode abroad as if on the wings of unseen dragons. The coast of the kingdom was beset and sorely harried by pirate galleys. Upon the west, the caravans coming and going through Calyz were assailed by redoubtable bands of robbers; and certain fierce desert peoples made war on the villages lying near to the southern border. The land was filled with turmoil and death, with lamentation and many miseries.

Deep was Amero's concern, hearing the distressful complaints that were brought before him daily. Being but little skilled in kingcraft, and wholly untried by the ordeals of dominion, he sought counsel of his courtlings but was ill advised by them. The troubles of the realm multiplied upon him: uncurbed by authority, the wild peoples of the waste grew bolder, and the pirates gathered like vultures of the sea. Famine and drouth divided his realm with the plague; and it seemed to Amero, in his sore perplexity, that such matters were beyond all medication; and his crown was become a too onerous burden.

Striving to forget his own impotence and the woful plight of his kingdom, he gave himself to long nights of debauch. But the wine refused its oblivion, and love had now forfeited its rapture. He sought other divertisements, calling before him strange maskers and mummers and buffoons, and assembling outlandish singers and the players of uncouth instruments. Daily he made proclamation of a high reward to any that could bemuse him from his cares.

Wild songs and sorcerous ballads of yore were sung to him by immortal minstrels; the black girls of the north, with amber-dappled limbs, danced before him their weird lascivious measures; the blowers of the horns of chimeras played a mad and secret tune; and savage drummers pounded a troublous music on drums made from the skin of cannibals; while men clothed with the scales and pelts of half-mythic monsters ramped or crawled grotesquely through the halls of the palace. But these were vain to beguile

the king from his grievous musings.

One afternoon, as he sat heavily in his hall of audience, there came to him a player of pipes who was clad in tattered homespun. The eyes of the man were bright as newly-stirred embers, and his face was burned to a cindery blackness, as if by the ardor of outland suns. Hailing Amero with small servility, he announced himself as a goatherd who had come to Shathair from a region of valleys and mountains lying sequestered beyond the bourn of sunset.

"O king, I know the melodies of oblivion," he said, "and I would play for you, though I desire not the reward you have offered. If haply I succeed in diverting you, I shall take my own guerdon in due time."

"Play, then," said Amero, feeling a faint interest rise within him at the bold speech of the piper.

Forthwith, on his pipes of reed, the black goatherd began a music that was like the falling and rippling of water in quiet vales, and the passing of wind over lonely hilltops. Subtly the pipes told of freedom and peace and forgetfulness lying beyond the sevenfold purple of outland horizons. Dulcetly they sang of a place where the years came not with an iron trampling, but were soft of tread as a zephyr shod with flower petals. There the world's turmoil and troubling were lost upon measureless leagues of silence, and the burdens of empire were blown away like thistle-down. There the goatherd, tending his flock on solitary fells, was possessed of tranquillity sweeter than the power of monarchs.

As he listened to the piper, a sorcery crept upon the mind of Amero. The weariness of kingship, the cares and perplexities, were as dream-bubbles lapsing in some Lethean tide. He beheld before him, in sun-bright verdure and stillness, the enchanted vales evoked by the music; and he himself was the goatherd, following grassy paths, or lying oblivious of the vulture hours by the margin of lulled waters.

Hardly he knew that the low piping had ceased. But the vision darkened, and he who had dreamt of a goatherd's peace was again a troubled king.

"Play on!" he cried to the black piper. "Name your own guerdon—and play."

The eyes of the goatherd burned like embers in a dark place at evening. "Not till the passing of ages and the falling of kingdoms shall I require of you my reward," he said enigmatically. "Howbeit, I shall play for you once more."

So, through the afternoon, King Amero was beguiled by that sorcerous piping which told ever of a far land of ease and forgetfulness. With each playing it seemed that the spell grew stronger upon him; and more and more was his royalty a hateful thing; and the very grandeur of his palace oppressed and stifled him. No longer could he endure the heavily jeweled yoke of duty; and madly he envied the carefree lot of the goatherd.

At twilight he dismissed the ministrants who attended him, and held speech alone with the piper.

"Lead me to this land of yours," he said, "where I too may dwell as a simple herder."

Clad in mufti, so that his people might not recognize him, the king stole from the palace through an unguarded postern, accompanied by the piper. Night, like a formless monster with the crescent moon for its lowered horn, was crouching beyond the town; but in the streets the shadows were thrust back by a flaming of myriad cressets. Amero and his guide were unchallenged

as they went toward the outer darkness. And the king repented not his forsaken throne: though he saw in the city a continual passing of biers laden with the victims of the plague; and faces gaunt with famine rose up from the shadows as if to accuse him of recreancy. These he heeded not: for his eyes were filled with the dream of a green silent valley, in a land lost beyond the turbid flowing of time with its wreckage and tumult.

Now, as Amero followed the black piper, there descended upon him a sudden dimness; and he faltered in weird doubt and bewilderment. The street lights flickered before him, and swiftly they expired in the gloom. The loud murmuring of the city fell away in a vast silence; and, like the shifting of some disordered dream, it seemed that the tall houses crumbled stilly and were gone even as shadows, and the stars shone over broken walls. Confusion filled the thoughts and the senses of Amero; and in his heart was a black chill of desolation; and he seemed to himself as one who had known the lapse of long empty years, and the loss of high splendor; and who stood now amid the extremity of age and decay. In his nostrils was a dry mustiness such as the night draws from olden ruin; and it came to him, as a thing foreknown and now remembered obscurely, that the desert was lord in his proud capital of Shathair.

"Where have you led me?" cried Amero to the piper.

For all reply, he heard a laughter that was like the peal of derisive thunder. The muffled shape of the goatherd towered colossally in the gloom, changing, growing, till its outlines were transformed to those of a giant warrior in sable armor. Strange memories thronged the mind of Amero, and he seemed to recall darkly something of another life. . . . Somehow, somewhere, for a time, he had been the goatherd of his dreams, content and forgetful . . . somehow, somewhere, he had entered a strange bright garden and had eaten a blood-dark fruit. . . .

Then, in a flaring as of infernal levin, he remembered all, and knew the mighty shadow that towered above him like a Terminus reared in hell. Beneath his feet was the cracked pavement of the seaward terrace; and the stars above the emissary were those that precede Canopus; but Canopus himself was blotted out by the Demon's shoulder. Somewhere in the dusty darkness, a leper laughed and coughed thickly, prowling about the ruined palace in which had once dwelt the kings of Calyz. All things were even as they had been before the making of that bargain through which a perished kingdom had been raised up by the powers of hell.

Anguish choked the heart of Xeethra as if with the ashes of burnt-out pyres and the shards of heaped ruin. Subtly and manifoldly had the Demon tempted him to his loss. Whether these things had been dream or necromancy or verity he knew not with sureness; nor whether they had happened once or had happened often. In the end there was only dust and dearth; and he, the doubly accurst, must remember and repent for evermore all that he had forfeited.

He cried out to the emissary: "I have lost the bargain that I made with Thasaidon. Take now my soul and bear it before him where he sits aloft on his throne of ever-burning brass; for I would fulfill my bond to the uttermost."

"There is no need to take your soul," said the emissary, with an ominous rumble as of departing storm in the desolate night. "Remain here with the lepers, or return to Pornos and his goats, as you will: it matters little. At all times and in all places your soul shall be part of the dark empire of Thasaidon."

"You shall have a long, very close interview with the Terror of the Moor."

The Trail of the Cloven Hoof

By ARLTON EADIE

A startling weird mystery story, of strange deaths on the desolate Moor of Exham, and the mysterious creature known as "The Terror of the Moor"

The Story Thus Far

WHAT is the real explanation of the mysterious monster—horned, cloven-footed, yet speaking with a human voice—which haunts the desolate recesses of Exmoor? The problem confronts Hugh Trenchard in a dramatic guise when he stumbles on Silas Marle lying stunned and helpless one misty night, and the subsequent disappearance of the old man's body only serves to deepen the mystery.

With the aid of a former fellow-student, Ronnie Brewster, Hugh determines to solve the mystery, and his resolution is strengthened when he learns that Silas Marle has bequeathed his entire fortune to him on that very condition. Accom-

This story began in WEIRD TALES for July

panied by Ronnie, he motors to Moor Lodge, Marle's former home, and in a safe there finds a letter which seems to give the clue to the origin of the Terror of the Moor.

According to this statement, Marle had discovered a method whereby the nitrogen of the atmosphere, combined with the natural elements contained in every living body, might be utilized as a means of wholesale slaughter. The chemical formula whereby this may be effected is contained in a sealed envelope, which Hugh replaces, unopened, in the safe.

Marle's letter further states that he had taken into his employ a half-witted lad known as Crazy Jake, who, having memorized the formula, was about to betray it to Professor Lucien Felger, a supposed secret agent in the pay of a foreign power. As the only means of preserving the secret, Marle determined to use his new invention on Jake as he made his way across the Moor to Felger's house.

The explosion completely destroys the lower portion of Jake's body, and Marle, leaving the remains lying on the Moor, hurries home, thinking his secret safe for all time. Some six months later, however, he is horrified to see the face of his victim gazing in at him through the window of Moor Lodge, and when he examines the spot where the apparition stood, he finds the unmistakable trail of cloven hoofs.

Reading in a newspaper that the Terror has attacked a local farmer named John Thacker, Hugh hastens to interview the injured man in the hope of getting a clue. But he finds Thacker suffering from symptoms which agree with those produced by a rare memory-destroying drug distilled from a plant which its discoverer, Herr Bräuschütter, has named *Datura obliterare*.

Returning to Moor Lodge, Hugh finds that his copy of the monograph, in which Bräuschütter describes the action of the drug, has been stolen from his bookcase. As the house has been kept under constant observation by the police, Hugh regards the theft as proof that there must be a secret entry into Moor Lodge.

24

THE detective stared at Hugh Trenchard after he had made his startling discovery, stared at him so long and with such a curious expression on his face that Hugh felt compelled to ask for an explanation.

"What's the matter, inspector? You look as if you only half believed me."

"Oh, I do not doubt your word in the least, sir. The book has gone—that's plain enough. But I rather think you're mistaken about there being a secret passage into this house. At any rate, if such a thing exists, I'll stake my reputation that it doesn't lead out into any of the galleries of the old mine where we have established our observation post. Since I spoke to you last I have gone over every foot of the old workings, and I found that every passage ended up in a wall of solid rock. In future we must seek for an explanation of the mysterious happenings that go on in this house without falling back on sliding panels and suchlike romantic contraptions. And I don't think there is much hope of recovering that book. If it was stolen for the purpose you suggest, it probably is in ashes by this time. We must not lose sight of the main thread in this infernal tangle. We must not forget that Professor Felger is out to get hold of the formula of Silas Marle's secret method of causing living bodies to detonate, and that he has two ways of getting it. One is to read the contents of the sealed packet that is

now in your safe. The other is to learn the formula from the madman who is masquerading as the Terror of the Moor."

"I see," nodded Hugh, "and your object is to prevent him accomplishing his purpose by either method?"

"Just so, sir, and I can assure you that I haven't been letting the grass grow under my feet. But the Terror had kept so quiet for the last two or three weeks that I was beginning to think he had quitted the neighborhood until I heard of his attack on those two men on Gallows Heath. That gave me a new starting-point for the investigation, and I wasn't slow in following it up. Within an hour of receiving the news I had Nick Froude and his stag-hounds on the spot, and by the lively way they led off on the trail I thought we'd have an easy task in running him down. You can imagine my disgust and disappointment when the hounds finally led us to a travelling freak-show and menagerie."

"A menagerie? That was strange," Hugh mused.

"It was more unlucky than strange," said Renshaw. "Who could have anticipated meeting a wandering Noah's Ark on a place like Exmoor? Of course, no pack of hounds on earth could be trusted to run true in the face of such a variety of different scents—there were elephants, tigers, and Lord knows what else in the show—maybe weasels and pole-cats, for all I know."

"To say nothing of the freaks," Hugh observed with a slight smile.

"Oh, they don't count. They're human—bearded women, living skeletons, armless wonders, and people like that. I thought the movies had given the death-blow to enterprises of that sort, but Carl Magno's Colossal Congress of Wild Animals and Living Wonders of the World—to give the exhibition its complete title—was quite an imposing affair. It was on the road from one fair-ground to another when I saw it, and, judging by appearances, there is still a kick or two left in the old-fashioned show business. There were quite a dozen large vans, drawn by a couple of powerful traction engines, and a smart Pullman caravan belonging to the proprietor. It was like a little palace on wheels inside—electric cooker, silver-plated fittings, radio set connected with a telescopic aerial, and all the comforts of a *bijou* flat in town. But of course Carl Magno didn't know anything about the Terror of the Moor. He opined that the hounds must have picked up the scent of one of his caged animals, and I think he was right. So that was *that!*"

"Hard luck, inspector," condoled Hugh. "What's the next move to be?"

But the detective was not to be drawn.

"The next move will come from the other side—and I have a feeling that it won't be long in coming, either!"

THE next morning Hugh drove into Excombe and called at Ronnie's surgery. Fully conversant with his chum's daily routine, he had timed himself to arrive soon after Ronnie's return from his round of morning visits; but to his surprize he found the place apparently deserted. He rang three times without getting an answer, and was on the point of turning away when, raising his eyes suddenly, he caught a glimpse of a figure in the act of drawing hastily back from one of the upstairs windows. Fleeting though the appearance was, it was enough to convince Hugh that there was a stranger in the house; for, while Ronnie had hair of a distinctly ruddy hue, that of the stealthy watcher was black as jet.

The police inspector's prediction of

hovering peril was hammering at Hugh Trenchard's brain as he stood hesitating on the doorstep. A stranger was inside the house—a stranger who preferred to reconnoiter through the window rather than answer the door; and what had happened to Ronnie Brewster? As he asked himself the question, all Hugh's vague misgivings crystallized into one great haunting fear for his friend's safety. He must enter the house and see for himself what was amiss.

Though he well knew the importance of haste, he was careful not to betray his intentions to the unseen watcher. He made a gesture of disappointment, glanced at his watch, shook his head, then turned and descended the steps and retraced his way to the garden gate. Here he again hesitated for a few moments, then, with the air of one whose patience is at an end, walked away briskly in the direction of the town.

But he went no farther than a few yards. The moment he was sure his movements could not be observed from the windows of the house, he turned and forced his way through the hedge and, keeping in the shelter of the belt of evergreen shrubs with which the garden was planted, made his way noiselessly toward the rear of the house. He raised the latch of the back door, and to his joy it yielded beneath his gentle push. Closing it behind him, he gently shot the bolts top and bottom and, pausing only long enough to slip off his shoes, crept through the house and fastened the front door in the same manner, taking the additional precaution of putting on the chain. He drew a long breath of satisfaction as he turned and slipped the revolver from his pocket and thumbed the safety-catch forward. Whatever might be the result of the coming encounter, he had at least made sure that the unknown intruder would have no swift and easy getaway.

With rapid, cat-like tread, planting his feet as near the wall as possible in order to lessen the risk of a betraying creak, he mounted the stairs. Arrived on the landing, he found himself confronted by three doors, all of which were shut. Putting his ear to each in turn, he listened intently, straining his ears with the knowledge that his life might hang upon their keenness. The right-hand door, which led to the room where he had seen the peering figure, yielded no result. Neither did the middle one, which led to Ronnie's bedroom. But from the third door, that of a room where Ronnie kept his private papers, he heard the faint sound of movement.

Over Hugh's set features there broke a smile of grim satisfaction. "Got him!" was his mental comment.

Firmly grasping the butt of his revolver in his right hand and placing his forefinger ready on the trigger, he laid his left hand on the door-knob and slowly began to turn it; his nerves taut as harp-strings, his muscles tensed for swift action should the sudden click of the disengaged latch betray his presence. At last the handle was turned to its fullest extent, and then, a fraction of an inch at a time, Hugh began to open the door.

Through the slowly widening slit he eagerly scanned each section of the room as it presented itself to his arc of vision. At first he could see nothing but a foreshortened section of wall; then the view gradually widened until it embraced one window; then came another section of wall, facing him this time, then another window; then the edge of a bureau set in the farther angle of the room. But it was not until the door was half-way open that Hugh saw the face of the man who was seated at the bureau. One look was enough. He flung wide the door and ad-

vanced openly into the room, his revolver trained point-blank on the sallow, black-bearded countenance of the intruder.

"Good morning, Professor Felger! It is indeed an unexpected pleasure to find *you* here of all places!" Hugh's voice had an edge like chilled steel as he went on: "But you must not assume that I'm so overwhelmed with joy that I can not shoot straight. And shoot I will at your first suspicious movement!"

The trapped man sat as though frozen into stone, his hands resting on the open desk before him, his eyes fixed on the unwavering muzzle of the revolver with an expression of unconcealed fear.

"Put up that gun, you fool!" he muttered thickly. "It might go off——"

"You bet it'll go off if you try any of your funny stunts," retorted Hugh, watching his every movement. "You made a goat of me the last time we met, but I think the last laugh is mine."

"Indeed?" a mirthless grin twisted the bearded lips. "And who do you think I am?"

Hugh Trenchard shook his head impatiently, determined to put an end to this trifling.

"It doesn't interest me what particular alias you are passing under at the moment, Professor. If there is such a thing as justice in this country you'll soon be identified by a number which it will not be so easy to change!"

Again the bearded man laughed, and this time there was a heartier ring in his mirth.

"Don't you realize who I am?" he cried. "Why, you purblind fool——"

"That's enough," Hugh interrupted curtly. "Put up your hands! You can't bluff me!"

"Indeed?" The slow smile still lingered about the bearded mouth as the other man slowly raised his hands, ostentatiously displaying their emptiness with the air of a stage conjurer demonstrating that "there is no deception."

KEENLY alert for the treachery which he felt sure was coming, Hugh followed his movement. Slowly the hands glided upward through the air until they were on a level with the captive's shoulders; then higher and slowly higher until his fingers touched his sleek black hair. Then came the climax like a bolt from the blue. Up shot the bearded man's hands above his head, stretched to the full extent of his arms, and with them rose his shock of jet-black hair. Beneath was a close-cropped head covered with hair of a shade that was strikingly familiar to Hugh's bulging eyes.

"Ronnie!" he almost shouted in his amazement. "Ronnie Brewster!"

The other coolly tossed the wig on to the desk and proceeded to peel off the short pointed beard, cursing fluently at intervals when the spirit gum refused to part company with the shaven skin underneath.

"Oh, hang it all," he spluttered, fingering his chin tenderly. "I'll take jolly good care to have a smooth shave before I stick that wretched face-fungus on again. Getting it off was just like being flayed alive——" He broke off, unable to restrain a laugh at the look which still lingered on Hugh's face. "Well, was my impersonation a success?"

Hugh's echoing laugh was a trifle forced.

"It was a great success, Ronnie. So much so that you nearly paid for your cleverness with your life. If you had made the slightest suspicious movement I should have had no hesitation in shooting you down!"

"Thanks, old thing," drawled Ronnie. "I thought I'd work the wheeze on you

first, but I'll confess it gave me a bit of a shock when I saw how ready you were to hand me an unsolicited testimonial in the shape of a bullet! But do you really think the make-up will pass muster?" he added anxiously.

"It was marvelous! I could have sworn that you were Professor Felger himself. If you act as cleverly as you acted just now you need have no fear of detection —unless, of course, you happen to meet the real professor."

"Ah, that would be dashed awkward. But I'll have to take jolly good care that he's safely out of the way before I attempt to enter the Torside Sanatorium. Was my voice all right?"

"Splendid! You're a born actor," Hugh cried enthusiastically. "I really don't know what keeps you off the professional stage."

"Don't you?" Ronnie queried with a grin. "Then I'll tell you. Two things prevent me from exhibiting my shining talents before applauding multitudes—one is 'the talkies' and the other is my partiality for regular meals. Get me?"

Hugh Trenchard looked at his chum for a moment, then nodded his head.

"Yes, I think I've got you all right," was his laughing answer. "Gad! what a blind fool you must have thought me not to have seen through your disguise."

Hugh was still smiling when he took his leave soon after and set out on his way back to Moor Lodge. Ronnie Brewster's ingenious plan had steered his thoughts into a new and more hopeful channel, and already a conviction was beginning to take shape in his mind that the next few days would witness the arrest of the elusive professor and the clearing up of the mystery which hung like a foul but invisible miasma over the girl he had grown to love.

25

THE following evening the sun dipped to rest behind the bare, rolling heights in a blaze of crimson and purple. Yet the very vividness of its grandeur was an omen of coming storm, an omen that was verified when the colors died out of the heavens and darkness descended on the Moor. For with the night came the unleashed wind in all its might and fury. The moon rose like a storm-tossed galleon new-launched on a sea of driving cloud. The voice of the gale dominated all other sounds, now moaning and wailing like a living thing in torment, now buffeting the sturdy walls of the house with all the malignity of baffled human fury; denuding the lashing trees of the last vestiges of their gorgeous autumn robes and flinging them in yellow tatters to the sodden earth.

Hugh Trenchard sat in the library of Moor Lodge, with a pipe, a book, and a blazing fire, and in spite of his comfortable surroundings he found himself shivering more than once as a blast fiercer than the rest shook the fabric of the ancient house.

On such a cheerless night a lonely man feels his loneliness most acutely, and it is scarcely to be wondered at that Hugh should find his thoughts wandering from the printed message of the book before his eyes, and journeying, as though whirled on the wings of the tireless gale, toward the girl who had come so strangely into his life. Joan . . . where was that girl of mystery now? Was she still hiding in that great deserted house in Excombe, lonely, solitary, even as he was? Were her thoughts flying to him, as his were to her? Or was she abroad on the Moor, battling with the winds in their furious revel, resolutely pursuing her mysterious and perilous quest?

A sudden sound, subtly differentiated

from the natural voices of the storm, snapped his train of thought. It was a footstep on the gravel path outside, noisy in spite of its slow, deliberate stealth, as though a heavily built man were endeavoring to approach the house without betraying his presence. Hugh sat motionless until the sound had been twice repeated; then he laid down his pipe and book and rose to his feet. Whether the unknown were friend or foe, he must be bent on a mission that would brook no delay to have come to him on such a night as this.

Was it the Terror? As the thought flashed to Hugh Trenchard's mind the very atmosphere of the room seemed to grow of a sudden fearful, with a thrill lurking in every shadowy nook and corner. Very softly, his feet making no noise on the carpeted floor, he crossed the room and took up a position against the wall, where, while his body was in some measure protected by the angle of the massive bookcase, he could watch the window of the room. It was, he reflected, the only illuminated window in the house, and if the stealthy visitant were indeed the cloven-footed Terror, it was from that direction that his attack would be launched.

There ensued a breathless, listening pause; then:

Tap . . . tap . . . tap!

Three knocks, slow and distinct, sounded on the leaded pane. Without doubt it was a signal, and one intended to reach no other ears than his. What did it portend? The warning of a friend, or the menace of a treacherous foe?

Tap . . . tap . . . tap!

Again it sounded. Intuition urged him to go to the window and ascertain the meaning of this summons; but caution whispered that it would be reckless folly to expose himself, silhouetted against the lamplight, to what might be waiting in the void of wind-swept blackness outside.

Tap . . . tap . . . tap!

At the first stroke of the repeated signal Hugh started to glide toward the window. Whipping out his revolver, and keeping well back to be out of range of a sudden shot, he stretched out his hand and unlatched the nearest casement.

"Who's there?" he challenged sharply.

"It's me, guv'nor," came a low, throaty whisper. "Jem Dawker."

Dawker—the giant gatekeeper of Professor Felger's so-called mental hospital! The information, though apparently frank and open, was far from reassuring.

"Well, Dawker, what do you want here?"

"Only to 'ave a few words with you, guv-nor," said the unseen man in a tone that was very humble. "Just a few words —in private like."

"You've chosen a queer time for an interview," Hugh remarked dryly. "Come and see me in the morning."

"I can't—I must see you now," the voice rose in a beseeching whine. "The morning will be too late—you'll regret it if you don't listen to me now."

For a few seconds Hugh stood with eyes narrowed in anxious thought. Remembering their previous encounters, it was scarcely likely that the man bore him any great good-will; he was, moreover, a paid servant of Professor Felger's. The most obvious explanation was that the whole thing was a carefully prepared trap. Yet its very obviousness made Hugh inclined to dismiss that theory. He felt sure that when the professor struck, his keen brain would evolve something more subtle, and more deadly, than such a palpable ambuscade. First of all, however, he must make sure that Dawker was alone.

"Wait a moment," he said, and imme-

diately turned and made his way to a small window which, set in an angle of the passage, commanded a view of the back of the house. Peering through, Hugh saw the outline of Dawker's huge bulk as he crouched against the library window. He could see no signs of any companions.

"I'll risk it," was his sudden decision. "After all, he may have something of importance to tell me."

He went to the back door and drew the bolts, purposely making enough noise to attract Dawker's attention to his action.

"I'm going to take you at your word, Dawker," he warned before he opened the door. "But if you intend trying any funny stunts it would be healthier for you to remain outside."

"Lor' love yer, guv'nor, I don't mean yer no 'arm. I'm on the square this time."

"Pleased to hear it," was Hugh's dry comment, as he allowed his visitor to catch a glimpse of the weapon he was fondling. "Come right in, Mr. Dawker, and may I trouble you to fasten those bolts behind you? Now be pleased to walk in front of me into that room on the left. Go right in, and don't be bashful —I have no young lady visitors here this time."

Dawker showed his yellow teeth in a grin at this oblique allusion to their last encounter.

"I don't blame yer for bein' a bit careful, doctor, but you'll have no call ter use that gun on me. I've come to do you a service."

"Yes?" prompted Hugh as the other paused.

"I've come to put you wise to something that'll give you the shock o' yer life."

"Really?"

"Yus, really an' truly," Dawker went on impressively. "I've managed to get hold of some valuable information — something that's worth big money. Un'erstand?"

"Yes, I understand," said Hugh in a tone that was far from encouraging. "I thought there was a catch in it somewhere."

Dawker scowled and stood silent, plucking nervously at his heavy jowl. It seemed plain that the man was ill at ease; was, in fact, already half regretting the step he had taken. He had expected his offer to meet with an eager and grateful acceptance, and Hugh Trenchard's undisguised skepticism filled him with a vague uneasiness. For a full minute he stood hesitating. Then, with the air of one making a plunge into dangerous waters, he leant forward confidentially and came to the point.

"How much would it be worth to you to get hold of information as to who Professor Lucien Felger really is?" he asked in a husky whisper.

Hugh Trenchard lifted his shoulders in a careless shrug.

"If you are trying to sell me the information that Felger is Herr Rudolf Bräschütter, the Austrian scientist who discovered the so-called 'Apple of Lethe,' I may tell you that you've come into the market a trifle late. I suspected as much the moment I detected the symptoms of the drug in Farmer Thacker."

For a moment Dawker was thrown off his balance by this unexpected avowal; but he quickly recovered.

"But that ain't all—not by a long chalk!" he went on eagerly. "The professor 'as been passing for somebody else —somebody you've met and talked with, and never suspected who he was. If you'll make it worth my while I'll put

evidence into your hands that'll send him down for a lifer."

"If you really possess such evidence I should advise you to hand it to the police."

Dawker's lips twitched as he shook his head.

"The perlice!" he repeated contemptuously. "'Ow much d'ye think the 'busies' would give me if I went to 'em? Nuthin'—and maybe they'd jug me into the bargain! I'm risking my life in comin' here, and I'm not doin' it for the fun of the thing, neither. See' ere: I'll make you a fair offer, man to man. Give me £500, and I'll spill enough to send Felger to the rope."

Hugh Trenchard shook his head.

"I hope to do that without your help," he said quietly.

Dawker showed his yellow teeth in a derisive grin.

"You'll never do that without my help, guv'nor—the professor is too fly for that! Why, even me, who's been workin' for him for years, never dreamt who he really was until yesterday—and then I only found out by accident. Don't you be afraid of not getting your money's worth if you hand over that £500. Why, if you knew 'arf of the devil's work that's been going on in that sanatorium, s'help me!—yer blessed eyes 'ud drop out o' your head! You're a doctor, and I suppose yer thinks yer knows all about operations, but I bet you've never seen such operations as the professor has been performin'!"

"What on earth are you hinting at?" Hugh cried sharply.

Apparently Dawker realized that he was giving away too much. A gleam of cunning came into his narrowed eyes as he shook his head.

"You'll get more than hints when yer pays the money; £500 is my price and it's worth every penny. Why, the newspapers 'ud give that to know what I know."

Hugh met this innocent assertion with a smile.

"The people who run newspapers have a very wholesome respect for the law of libel, and they generally prefer to wait until cases come into the courts before offering their comments. I should advise you to leave the newspapers alone and take your story to the police."

"Yus, and a fat lot I should get out o' *that!* I came 'ere thinking to 'ave a square deal with you——"

"Then I'm sorry to say you have wasted your time." Hugh's tone was final. "Even if I had that sum of money to throw away for information which may be of little or no real value, I should be compelled to inform the police authorities before any active steps could be taken in the matter."

"So the deal is off?" Dawker's face was a mask of ill-suppressed fury as he growled out the words.

Hugh Trenchard motioned to the door with the hand which still held the revolver.

"Absolutely, Mr. Dawker."

The would-be informer preserved a sullen silence as he allowed himself to be shepherded to the back door, but once he was outside, his rage exploded in a savage oath.

"And it won't be long before you're sorry you turned down my offer!" he added darkly.

Disregarding the outburst, Hugh began to close the door, whereupon Dawker's fury got the better of his discretion.

"As you're so almighty clever, you'd better start lookin' after that gal o' yours!" he shouted recklessly. "When the professor gets hold of her, he'll serve her the same as he served Crazy Jake——"

"What's that?" Hugh flung wide the half-closed door as he jerked out the words. "Here, come back! I want to talk to you."

But Dawker was aware that he had said too much for his own safety. Swift as a hare, he darted into the shadow of the trees and the next moment a succession of flashes and quick staccato reports of an automatic showed that he had not come on his errand unarmed.

Trenchard stepped smartly back into the cover of the porch as he heard the vicious smack of the bullets on the surrounding brickwork. He had no intention of playing a deadly game of hide-and-seek by attempting to follow the fugitive in the darkness. Dawker himself could wait; but his hint of hovering peril to Joan Endean filled Hugh's heart with a vague, intangible fear. Of course, the man's words might have been nothing but bluff. On the other hand——

A SERIES of knocks on the front door, delivered with a peculiar rhythm, caused the young man's brow to clear with lightning-like rapidity. It was the agreed signal by which the inspector from Scotland Yard had arranged to make his presence known.

"What was the shooting?" was Inspector Renshaw's first question after Hugh had admitted him.

"Oh, it was merely the gentle Dawker's mode of expressing his disapproval of my refusal to present him with a cool five hundred," and Hugh gave the pith of the gatekeeper's offer. Long before he had finished, Renshaw was rubbing his hands together and showing other signs of intense satisfaction.

"So there's a split in the enemy camp? That's good news! You know the old adage about what happens when thieves fall out. I'll fix Mr. Dawker all right. Once I get him in the cooler he'll be ready enough to talk—and without being presented with a £500 memory-course, either! I'll get a warrant out and circulate his description first thing in the morning. In the meantime I should like to have a bit of a talk with you, Doctor Trenchard. You've seen as much of the queer happenings round here as anybody; in fact, they did not begin to happen until you turned up here—and there may be one or two points on which you may be able to assist me."

Nothing loth, Hugh led the way into the library, heaped some more logs on the fire and sat down to listen as the police officer went over some of the knotty points. But it was not until some two hours later, when Renshaw was about to take his leave, that he let fall a remark which seemed to cast a new light on the baffling mystery.

"Don't you think it's rather funny that we have not found any trace of Silas Marle's body?" was the remark in question.

But Hugh merely shrugged. "You must bear in mind that Exmoor is an extensive tract of country, and I should say it was one of the most sparsely inhabited districts in England. There are plenty of places in it that are never trodden by a human foot from one year's end to another."

"Supposing that the old man was still alive?" Inspector Renshaw went on in a speculative tone.

"Impossible!" The amazing theory almost took Hugh's breath away. "Sergeant Jopling saw him lying dead."

A faint smile deepened the lines about the inspector's mouth.

"I rather fancy the sergeant didn't stop long enough to make a cool and detailed examination of the body, and the next time he entered the room the alleged

corpse had mysteriously vanished. Now, I've had plenty of time to think things over from various angles during my lonely watches in the dug-out over yonder, and I have come to the conclusion that old Marle had a very good reason for allowing certain people to assume that he was dead. On his own admission, the Terror of the Moor was on his track with the avowed intention of killing him at sight. The mere fact that he presented his house and fortune to you by means of a letter of attorney, instead of the usual will, argues that he anticipated disappearing in such a mysterious fashion that it would not be possible to prove his death to the satisfaction of the Probate Court. Moreover, he had very artfully contrived to saddle you with the responsibility, and the risk, of living here as his deputy; bribing you with a fortune to which you would have not the shadow of a legal claim the moment he turned up safe and sound. You must admit that if the cunning old devil wanted to preserve the secret of his precious chemical formula, and at the same time save his skin, he could scarcely have put up a more convincing fade-out."

For a full minute Trenchard remained silent. The new aspect which had opened up before his eyes at the inspector's words was so unexpected, so full of sinister possibilities, that for the time being he was dazed. Almost unconsciously his mind groped for evidence to refute the unwelcome theory which, if true, would prove him to be nothing but a too-confiding dupe of an unscrupulous schemer.

"You seem to have forgotten that the all-important formula has been left in my keeping," he said at length. "And it is still in its sealed envelope in the safe here."

"Have you opened that sealed envelope?" Renshaw asked quickly.

"Of course not. Marle left implicit instructions that I was not to break the seal."

"Then how on earth can you tell if the formula is really inside?"

Trenchard could only answer by a helpless shrug, and the inspector went on, speaking with the air of a man who can not relinquish a new and compelling theory: "Now I'm here, why not examine the contents of that envelope in my presence? I don't suppose you have forgotten that you have been fooled once with a sealed envelope that contained nothing but blank paper? What if this other envelope is just such another fake?"

Trenchard started to his feet and faced the inspector squarely.

"There's more than guesswork in this," he declared. "Come, put your cards on the table. What do you know?"

Inspector Renshaw shook his head.

"I know no more than you do, sir, but that doesn't prevent me suspecting a great deal more. I have a big opinion of Professor Felger's enterprise and daring, and I can not square my opinion of him with the plain fact that he has allowed something like three months to pass without an attempt to break open that safe of yours. Something must have stopped him, and that something might have been the knowledge that the envelope was not worth the trouble of stealing."

"We'll soon see about that," cried Trenchard. "I'm going to see the inside of that envelope right now!"

Possessed with an impatience which demanded instant action, he hurried from the room and into the laboratory. The key was already in the lock of the safe, when a loud, strident voice, coming from the direction of the room they had just quitted, banished every other thought from his mind.

"Hello, hello! Ronnie Brewster call-

ing!" it said. "I'm in danger and I need your help. Hustle along to my surgery at once!"

26

THE man from Scotland Yard stopped dead and turned an inquiring face to Hugh.

"What's that?"

"It's the radio set with which I keep in touch with my friend at Excombe—I always keep it tuned in to our particular short wave-length——"

"The devil you do!" ejaculated the police inspector, a look of dismay mounting on his features. "And have you a transmitter at your end?"

"Of course."

"Well, you might have dropped me a hint before. When I was talking to you just now I might have been broadcasting my private theories all over Europe! For all I know, the very man I'm after might have been listening to every word I uttered!"

"I don't think so," Hugh assured him. "Our wave-length is so short that an ordinary radio set would be unable to pick it up and——"

"Hello, hello!" interrupted Ronnie's voice from the loud-speaker. "Wake up, Hugh, and get busy. I'm having a spot of bother this end. Are you listening, Hugh?"

Trenchard made a flying jump for the transmitting microphone.

"Yes, yes. I'm here. What is happening?"

"Trouble; I was just about to turn in when I caught sight of a couple of men skulking among the bushes of my back garden. One was a great giant of a man——"

"Dawker?" gasped Hugh.

"I expect it's him," came the hurried reply. "But that's not the worst. Those two birds have managed to break into the house, and I, like a blithering idiot, haven't got so much as a pea-shooter on the premises."

"You'd better look out then! I know for a fact that Dawker is armed. He had a good try to pot me about four hours since, but——"

"Just a moment—time is precious," interrupted Ronnie's voice. "I have already rung up Sergeant Jopling at the local police station—on the ordinary line telephone, of course—and he is answering now. . . ."

There was a slight pause, then Hugh and Inspector Renshaw heard Ronnie speaking to the sergeant.

"That you, sergeant?" they heard him say. "Doctor Brewster speaking. . . . Yes, from my surgery. Two strange men have entered my house. . . . What's that? Burglars? Well, I suppose so, for *I* didn't invite 'em to call. They are outside the door of the room from which I am speaking now—trying to force the lock. You'd better rush your men round at once, for——"

The sound of a muffled pistol shot cut into Ronnie's explanation. In an agony of fear for his friend's safety, Hugh Trenchard bent over the radio microphone and called repeatedly, asking what had happened. To his relief he heard his friend's voice continuing the conversation with Sergeant Jopling.

"Yes, that was a shot," it said, obviously in answer to a question from the other end of the line telephone. "But I'm all right—so far. The shot was fired by one of the burglars on the other side of the door. I fancy somebody was hit, for I distinctly heard a groan and a thud. Hurry along with your contingent of cops, for the love of Mike! . . . What?—they're on their way? Good lads. . . . I'll be mighty pleased to see 'em."

HUGH TRENCHARD waited to hear no more. With a hurried "Come along," to Renshaw, he flew to the garage, ran out the car, and in a few minutes the two were speeding over the deserted roads in the direction of the little market town. It was not long before the swift machine drew up before the red lamp of Ronnie Brewster's surgery. Every window in the house was brightly illuminated, and the outline of a helmeted head against the stained-glass windows of the front entrance showed that the local police were already on the scene.

The constable who was guarding the door seemed inclined to dispute their entry, but a word from Inspector Renshaw made him stand aside with a respectful salute. Without further hindrance they stepped into the hall and shut the door. Before them stretched the hall and staircase, looking very spick and span with spotless white-enamelled woodwork and tapestry wallpaper of a rich but subdued shade. A low murmur of voices came from a room on the lower floor. Renshaw advanced to the door and knocked.

"Come in," invited the heavy voice of Sergeant Jopling.

There were three other men in the room when Inspector Renshaw and Hugh entered; two of them were constables in uniform, and their presence, combined with that of the man on duty outside, showed that almost the whole personnel of the local force had turned out in answer to Ronnie's call. The third occupant of the room was Ronnie Brewster himself. He stood with his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, puffing at a cigarette with an air of nonchalance; but his white, drawn features seemed to hint that his nerves were still at their tightest stretch. He greeted Hugh and his companion with a smiling nod, but their reception by Sergeant Jopling was not so friendly.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said, adding, in a dry tone, "It seems as if ill news must travel mighty fast in your direction. May I ask what made you call here at this time of night?"

Ronnie stepped forward and in a few words explained how he had called up Moor Lodge at the same time as he had given the alarm at the police station.

"Wireless, hey?" grunted Jopling. "Well, well, we do live in a scientific age, and no mistake about it."

"What has happened?" It was Inspector Renshaw who spoke, only to have his curt question met by a suspicious stare from Sergeant Jopling. But he anticipated the crushing retort that was trembling on the sergeant's lips by adding quietly, "I am Detective-Inspector Renshaw of the C. I. D."

Jopling's manner underwent a remarkable change.

"I'm pleased to meet you, inspector," he said affably, though it was plain that he was completely mystified by the prompt appearance of a representative of Scotland Yard. "Did you arrive by wireless, too?"

Inspector Renshaw ignored this piece of rustic wit.

"What has happened?" he repeated, somewhat impatiently.

"Murder, sir," was Jopling's brief response. Then, in a sepulchral tone, he supplemented his information with: "The body is upstairs."

"Then let's have a look at it," said Renshaw briskly. "Come with me, Doctor Trenchard. As a medical man your evidence may be useful at the inquest, and," he added as an afterthought, "at the trial, too, when we get hold of the one who did it."

At the top of the first flight of stairs was a small landing; another, shorter flight led to a space which might be described either as another landing or a passage, seeing that it ran almost the entire depth of the house. Sprawled in the center was the body of a man, its legs toward the stairs, its head within a few inches of the door of the room which Ronnie used as a study, and which contained the radio set from which he had sent the message to Hugh. Evidently the body was lying where it had fallen after the fatal shot, for the knees were still flexed and the face still turned to the floor, just as a man sags and crumples forward when overtaken by instantaneous death. Hugh Trenchard had no need to look at the hidden face to identify that gigantic figure.

"Dawker!" he exclaimed. "He has been shot from behind, and at close quarters, too. See how his hair has been scorched by the discharge of the weapon."

"How long has he been dead?" asked Renshaw. "That's the most important point for the time being."

With an effort the young doctor turned the huge body over; kneeling down, he opened the coat and vest.

"He has not been dead more than half an hour, at the most," he declared presently. "The flesh is still quite warm."

"I suppose he really *is* dead?" the sergeant put in suddenly.

Hugh Trenchard pointed to the film of gray which mingled with the crimson stream that had gushed from the wound.

"The bullet passed clean through the brain, causing instant death," he said in a tone of quiet decision. "He was shot from behind while standing on the same spot as he lies now."

"How can you tell that?" demanded Renshaw.

"There are several things which point to that conclusion. "Take the general attitude in which the body was lying before I turned it over. When a man is shot in a vital spot, his knees immediately give way and he falls forward, crumpling up—'like an empty sack' is a rather crude but graphic way of describing it—and assuming a posture that it would be very difficult to imitate in a body that had once been shifted. Besides that, you will notice that the bloodstain on the carpet exactly corresponds with the spot where the head was resting. But the most convincing proofs are here——"

Rising to his feet, Hugh pointed to the door of the study, indicating a spot where a group of tiny red spots, clustered around a neatly drilled bullet hole, marred the whiteness of the enamelled surface.

"That hole could only have been made by the bullet after it had passed through Dawker's head. The spots of blood were thrown forward by the force of the discharged cartridge. Taken in conjunction, they prove conclusively that the fatal shot was fired *outside* the closed door."

Inspector Renshaw had listened throughout with his eyes fixed on the young doctor in an expression of undisguised admiration. At the conclusion he nodded his head slowly.

"Appears to me that there was a good detective lost when you decided to take up medicine," he remarked. "Your reconstruction of the crime lets your friend out completely."

"Ronnie!" cried Trenchard in surprize. "Surely you did not suspect that he committed the murder himself?"

There was a curious expression on Inspector Renshaw's face as he stood pinching his chin thoughtfully.

"This case is getting into such a glorious tangle that I'd be suspecting my own grandmother—if I had one. But I don't mind admitting to you, doctor, that at

first sight your friend's phone call, at the very time that the shot was fired, looked just a little bit like a ready-made, cast-iron, cut-and-dried alibi. For you must bear in mind the fact that it is quite possible for a man to talk into a telephone receiver and fire a pistol at the same time. But there is only one telephone instrument in the house, and only one radio microphone; so if Doctor Brewster was talking at the time, he must have been in his study. And if he was in his study, and Dawker was shot on the landing on the other side of the closed door—shot from behind, too—it follows that the murder must have been committed by the *other* man, whom Brewster saw lurking in the garden before the house was entered." The detective paused for a moment and his eyes narrowed. "Now I wonder who that other man was."

"Probably my friend will be able to furnish you with his description," Hugh suggested.

"Ah, yes, perhaps so. I will question him on that point."

Together they descended the stairs to the room where Ronnie still sat smoking. But he shook his head dubiously at the inspector's query.

"I'm afraid I can't help you very much. It was too dark to see details," he explained. "I recognized Dawker by his huge stature. All I noticed about the other chap was that he was of a very much slighter build. He appeared to be quite a young lad, in fact."

"Something like a girl would look if she were dressed in man's clothes?" interpolated Sergeant Jopling.

"A girl!" Ronnie's eyes widened. "By Jove, I never thought of that! Have you any special reason for asking that question, sergeant?"

"Oh, no," Jopling responded airily. "It's just a theory of mine—only a little theory I've always had a great respect for the good old Italian proverb—or maybe it's French—which means 'Find the lady'."

"Reminds me of the three-card game that I've seen played in the race-trains," laughed Hugh Trenchard. "Speaking from my youthful experiences in that direction, I can assure you that it's far easier to pick a blank than to put your hand on the elusive lady."

"I'll put my hand on her, all right," asserted Sergeant Jopling, "and before long, too."

Scarcely had the policeman uttered his confident boast when the sounds of scuffling footsteps, accompanied by a muffled scream, came from the direction of the front garden of the house. The whole party, headed by Inspector Renshaw, made a simultaneous dash for the front door. Tearing it open, they saw the burly constable who had been left on duty there grasping a dishevelled, struggling figure.

"Caught her crouching among the bushes, sir," gasped the almost breathless man. "She fought like a wild-cat——"

As he spoke he swung his prisoner round so that she faced the group as they emerged from the front door. At the same moment another constable switched on his lamp, and by its white, merciless glare Hugh Trenchard saw a sight that turned his heart to ice.

The girl was Joan Endean, and in her right hand she held a heavy automatic pistol.

RENSHAW darted forward and wrenched the weapon from her grasp.

"Here;" he said, handing it to the sergeant, "this will be useful to compare with the bullet-hole in the door upstairs."

"But the girl——"

"Leave her to me."

There was a sharp metallic click, and Hugh saw the girl he loved with a pair of regulation handcuffs fettering her slender wrists.

"I'll run her down to the station and be back in a few minutes," the inspector continued in a tone of brisk command. "Get inside the house, all of you. And nobody is to leave until I return."

Laying his hand on his prisoner's shoulder, he turned and strode rapidly into the darkness. Hugh, with one long, agonized look backward, turned and followed the others inside.

The period of waiting which ensued was one long torture to him. Although no accusation had been made against Joan, he well knew the construction that would be placed on her presence there armed with a weapon similar to that with which Dawker had been shot. Was she, in very truth, the second, slighter figure that had accompanied Dawker to the house?

As the minutes sped by, with no sign of Inspector Renshaw's return, his first feeling of dazed bewilderment began to give place to a sensation of vague, haunting dread. At last he could bear the suspense no longer. Springing to his feet, he made his way to Sergeant Jopling.

"That inspector seems to have been gone a mighty long time," he burst out impulsively. "He has had time to get to the station and back a dozen times by now."

Jopling looked up with an amused grin.

"What are you handing me?" he asked derisively.

"Good advice," snapped Hugh. "If you'll take it, you'll get on the phone to your station and find out what has happened to Renshaw—and his prisoner!"

Something in the young man's tone checked the grin that was spreading over the sergeant's broad features. He rose to his feet, took the stairs three at a time, and presently they heard his voice raised in a bellow like that of an angry bull.

"We've been sold!—hoaxed!—swindled!" he shouted as he re-entered the room. "That fellow Renshaw was no more a Scotland Yard man than you are! They haven't seen a sign of him at the station, but a fast car went by a few minutes after he had left here. What a danged fool I was to take him at his word!"

"But if he wasn't a C. I. D. man, why has he arrested Miss Endean?" cried Hugh.

Ronnie Brewster, who had been sitting with his brows creased in deep thought, now started to his feet with a sudden cry.

"Arrested?—*abducted,* you mean! I see it all now! Professor Felger was out to get that girl from the start—and now he has got her from under the very noses of all of you. Detective-Inspector Renshaw, the man you trusted in and confided with all your plans, was Professor Lucien Felger without his beard and make-up!"

27

SOME four hours later, when the last fitful gusts of the spent storm were fanning the dawn-tinged sky, a racing car wound upward along the steep moorland road that led to the Torside Sanatorium. In it crouched the muffled figures of Hugh and Ronnie.

The disappearance of the girl he loved had forced Hugh to embark on an adventure which even his daring and sanguine spirit recognized as a forlorn hope. Alone and unaided, he and his friend were about to penetrate the defenses of the sinister Sanatorium and beard Professor Felger in his den.

It was not from choice that he had dispensed with the assistance of the police. On the contrary, he had wasted precious time in trying to induce the phlegmatic Sergeant Jopling to raid the place at once. But his pleadings had only met with a flat refusal. The worthy sergeant had too great a respect for the majesty of the law to act in such a sensible yet unprecedented manner. Information must be lodged, a warrant duly sworn, and heaven alone knows what other technicalities gone through before a single police-constable could violate the sanctity of a private dwelling by putting his foot across the threshold. It was in vain that Hugh pointed out that every minute wasted lessened the chances of the girl's rescue. Sergeant Jopling was obdurate; the search must be conducted according to the rules set forth in the Police Code, be the consequences what they might. Finally, his heart filled with despair, Hugh had flung caution to the winds and had openly proclaimed his intention of taking the matter into his own hands. That night, he had told the outraged Jopling, he would be a law unto himself.

They parked the car in a narrow combe, thickly overgrown with bushes, some distance from the house, and proceeded on foot, avoiding the main gates and making for a section of the encircling wall that could not be overlooked from the house. Hugh's main endeavor was to make his approach without being observed by anyone who might be on the watch, and in this he had reason to think he was successful. The high wall offered scarcely any obstacle to him and his equally athletic friend. Once they were inside, the dense undergrowth of the neglected grounds afforded them an ample screen for their movements.

"So far, so good," Ronnie said in a low voice as the two crouched in the shadow of the bushes on the inner fringe of the plantation. "And where do we go from here?"

For a moment Hugh Trenchard made no reply. His eyes were scanning the outline of the house which loomed before them, silent—seemingly deserted—eery in the ghostly gray light which heralded the coming dawn. The two tiers of shuttered windows stared blankly from its long, flat façade. If lights were burning within, no unshrouded chink or crevice allowed an escaping gleam to betray the fact. Hugh shook his head as he summed up the chances of making a successful entry from that direction.

"Let's have a look at the other side," he whispered; and, retreating far enough to place a screen of vegetation between themselves and the house, they made a rapid but stealthy circuit. Suddenly Hugh stopped and pointed.

"Look!" he whispered.

But Ronnie had already caught sight of the oblong patch of darker shadow which showed low down on the dark wall. It was a window, set so near the ground that it could only belong to a subterranean chamber. Silent as gliding shadows, they propelled their bodies through the long rank grass. Their nearer approach showed that the window was guarded with a heavy iron grating. But no sooner had Hugh laid his hand on the interlaced bars before he gave a low exclamation of satisfaction. The iron was deeply corroded with rust, more especially the lower part, where the accumulated rainwater in the stone sockets had so eaten away the ends of the bars which were embedded in them that the large oxidized flakes crumbled away beneath his fingers.

Grasping the grating with both hands and bracing their legs against the sur-

rounding masonry, the two men simultaneously pulled and pushed. The iron creaked and groaned beneath the strain; then, with a suddenness which sent them both sprawling on their backs, the whole grating came away from the stonework.

HUGH was on his feet again in an instant, flashing his torch through the now unprotected opening. Some ten feet below was the stone-flagged floor of a cellar. Beyond the angle of the keen white ray was a veil of blackness which looked almost solid. Without pausing to allow his mind to dwell on the question of what might be lurking beyond his range of vision, Hugh lowered himself through the window and dropped lightly on the flags beneath. A moment later Ronnie landed beside him.

Again Hugh brought his flashlight into use, and now he could see to the confines of the chamber in which they stood. But it contained nothing except rows of empty wine-bins ranged round the walls. Thick dust lay everywhere; festoons of black cobwebs hung from the vaulted roof; a dank, death-like odor clung to the weeping walls.

"This place hasn't been used for years," Hugh whispered. "We're not likely to discover much here."

The only exit from the cellar was a low but broad archway which, they found, led into another and even larger chamber. With its rows of massive pillars supporting its arched roof, it looked more like the crypt of some ancient church than the cellar of an ordinary country house. The same thought seemed to strike Hugh Trenchard, for he stepped close to one pillar and threw the beam of his torch on the carving of the capital.

"Look, Ronnie," he whispered. "If that is not Norman work I'll eat my hat! The Sanatorium is a comparatively modern house, but it must have been built over the foundations of one much more ancient. Look at those semicircular arches—and that dog-tooth molding—that massive stonework." Abruptly he stopped speaking and sniffed the air. "Smells as if the place has recently been used as a stable."

Ronnie clutched his arm and pointed.

"By Jove, you're right! Look at that great heap of straw in that corner——"

But Hugh had stepped forward and was bending over something which sent forth a musical jangle as he lifted it from the ground.

"I've never seen a stable where they used a halter like this!" he said with a queer catch in his voice.

It was a heavy steel chain, about ten feet in length, having one end firmly riveted to a huge staple that was driven into one of the pillars. The other terminated in a leather-lined steel collar large enough to fit a Newfoundland dog. Near by was a jug of enamelled tinware containing the dregs of a liquid which looked and smelt like ale; a dish of the same material held several picked bones and a knife and fork. Thrown carelessly in the straw was a child's picture book containing brightly colored illustrations of different animals.

For a while the two examined these objects in silence. Then their eyes met in a long, questioning look.

"It's a queer kind of horse that eats meat, drinks beer, uses a knife and fork, and looks at pictures!" was the remark with which Hugh broke the grim silence. "It strikes me that some creature has been kennelled here which had to be kept from the light of day."

Ronnie gave a low laugh and shook his head.

"Such things belong to melodrama, old thing," he said lightly. "Probably the

man who looked after the gee-gee had his supper down here."

"And learnt his alphabet from a child's picture-book?" was Hugh's dry rejoinder.

"That?" Ronnie shrugged. "Oh, that was probably a bit of rubbish, thrown down here and forgotten."

Hugh Trenchard was far from convinced by this simple explanation, but he realized that nothing would be gained by pursuing the argument. He had already begun to move away when Ronnie stopped him with a sudden whispered question.

"I suppose you did not forget to bring your revolver with you?"

"Hardly!" he returned grimly.

"Is it loaded?" Ronnie went on anxiously.

"I should say it is!"

"You're sure of that?—quite sure?"

"Of course I am," Hugh answered a trifle impatiently. "What are you getting jumpy about?"

"Nothing. Only I'd just like to make sure that your gun is in working order. Do you mind if I have a look at it before we go any farther?"

Without the slightest hesitation Hugh thrust his hand to his hip and handed his weapon to his friend.

"Well, are you satisfied now?" he asked, after Ronnie had squinted into the chambers.

"Oh, quite. By the way," Ronnie Brewster went on quickly and eagerly, "it has just struck me that you might have been right when you said that some strange animal had been housed in this cellar. This is a queer contrivance." He stooped and picked up the chain and looked thoughtfully at the steel collar. "It almost looks as if it had been made to fit the neck of a human being. Do you mind if I try it on you for a moment?"

Hugh stared at him for a few seconds to make sure he was really serious. "We're wasting time——" he began to protest, but Ronnie cut him short.

"It'll only take a moment, and I'd like to make sure that my theory is correct."

"Oh—all right, then."

Ronnie bent forward and placed the hinged sections about Hugh Trenchard's neck. The ring of steel fitted him slightly more loosely than an ordinary linen collar.

"Do be careful not to fasten it," he said hastily, as he felt his friend fumble with the catch at the back.

"All right," said Ronnie easily.

But even as he gave the assurance his hands pressed the two ends of the collar together, and a faint but unmistakable click told that a spring-lock had engaged.

FILLED with sudden dismay at his friend's clumsiness, Hugh grasped the collar and tried to pull the sections apart. They were as immovable as if they had been rivetted about his throat.

"You silly fool!" he gasped. "I might not be able to get this thing off!"

Ronnie Brewster stepped back a few paces and his features underwent a sudden change.

"No, Doctor Trenchard," he said calmly and deliberately. "It is yourself who is the silly fool, for you certainly will not be able to get it off!"

For a moment Hugh Trenchard thought that he had not heard aright.

"What do you mean?" he cried, still tugging at the encircling steel. "Is this some mad practical joke?"

"I hope you may find it so," was the other's cool response. "But you are at least right in thinking that the laugh is with me. Let me advise you not to waste your strength in trying to force open that collar. Before now it has defied the efforts of a creature of superhuman

strength—a creature, Doctor Trenchard, which you have long desired to meet. Soon, very soon, maybe, your wish will be granted. You shall have the opportunity of a long and close—*very close*—interview with the Terror of the Moor!"

There was a pause, during which Hugh tried to fathom the other's meaning. Even then he could not bring himself to believe in the black treachery of the man whom he had trusted as a brother. The only construction he could place on his wild words and extraordinary behavior was that he had suddenly gone mad.

"Come, Ronnie, this jest has gone far enough," he cried sharply. "I'm ready to allow that I was a goof to let myself be tricked into being fettered like this. But it was a silly trick for one friend to play on another at such a time."

"Did you say a *friend?*" The man whom he had known as Ronnie Brewster repeated the word with peculiar emphasis, his eyes lighting up with a baleful radiance, a cold, satiny smile playing about his lips.

"Of course. Are you not my friend?"

"Your friend?—*ewige Verdammung!* —no!—a thousand times no!" Gone were the drawling utterance and the vacuous smile of the erstwhile Ronnie. His face was contorted into a mask of fury, his voice like pent-up thunder bursting forth from a placid sky. "I am no friend of yours, Hugh Trenchard, and never was! My friendship was but a cloak so that I could use you as my tool —my cat's-paw—my foolish monkey who would pull the chestnuts out of the fire for me! But there is no need for me to fawn and truckle to you now, *Gott sei Dank!* Now I can throw off the mask and tell you to your face that I hate both you and the whole of your accursed nation!—tell you that such a man as Ronald Brewster never existed—that his name was but an English-sounding form of 'Rudolf Bräuschütter,' the scientist who discovered the drug of oblivion, and the man who was known to you as Professor Lucien Felger!"

Hugh Trenchard listened aghast. His brain was dazed and numb, like that of a man who sees his world reeling into ruin about him.

"Then you—*you* are Professor Felger?" he could only stammer.

The other threw back his head and responded with a peal of guttural laughter.

"So, at last you begin to see the obvious, *nicht wahr?* Now that I have revealed my secret, a glimmering of understanding lights up your dull English brain. *Himmel!* what a nation of trustful fools you are—you English! You will never learn your lesson—not even the experience of one great war will make you wise and wary. Do you imagine that an enemy will become a friend because you have beaten him? Don't you know that the only way to treat a fallen foe is to trample him down so that he can never rise again? *Lieber Gott!* it makes me ashamed of my victory when I see what arrant fools I have pitted my great skill against! Fooling you English is as easy as robbing a blind cat of a dead mouse!"

Hugh Trenchard's eyes flashed.

"It would be a better simile if you said it was as easy as blinding a man with vitriol while grasping his hand in friendship!" he cried in a voice of loathing and disgust. "But what is the use of wasting breath? Doubtless your code of honor would regard such an action as a crowning triumph of strategy."

"It would indeed be a waste of words to try to influence me with your sob stuff." There was a smoldering fanaticism in the cold, hard voice. "What are senti-

ment, honor and friendship but empty words, weighing less than so many grains of dust when poised in the balance against the mighty prize for which I have been striving? Well enough I knew that the nation which held the secret of a gas, capable of rendering all living matter within its zone of influence self-exploding, would hold the means whereby the future domination of the world might be secured. That is the prize I strove for, and that is the prize I have won!"

"You have won?" Hugh ejaculated incredulously. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that my mission in England has ended — that Silas Marle's secret formula is now within my grasp. Within a few hours I shall have made enough of the detonating gas to annihilate a regiment."

Professor Felger paused and allowed his eyes to rest on his shackled prisoner in a glare of implacable menace. "And you, Doctor Hugh Trenchard, shall have the honor of being my first victim!"

The startling climax of this story will be told in the fascinating chapters which conclude this mystery tale in next month's WEIRD TALES.

Fog

By MARY C. SHAW

—A specter is the fog—

Its clammy fingers thin and gray
Strangle the golden sunny day;
It stills the young one's laughter bold,
Stiffens the marrow of the old.

Across the sea fog throws a veil,
It loves the dying sailor's wail;
For ghoul and thug it clouds the light,
Makes blacker still the darkest night.

Fog covers murder, hides the gore;
And when its evil deeds are o'er
It slinks in pallid wisps to glide
Where slimy creatures slip and slide.

—Foul specter is the fog!—

The Werewolf's Howl

By BROOKE BYRNE

A short story of the weird doom that awaited the baron when his time should come to die

THE doctor walked briskly through the chill night, his cloak wrapped closely about him. The white light of a full moon showed him his way clearly, for all that on either side the forest was black with shadow, and full of vague cracklings and reports like pistol shots as the frost gripped the pine branches. His way ran through the forest of Martheim, up the steep slope that led to Schloss Martheim, his goal. Within that gloomy pile the old Baron Martheim was dying.

The thought of the great, shadowy room where, in a canopied carven bed, the old man waited for death, made the doctor quicken his pace. Ever since the young doctor had come to the little village that snuggled close to the river below the bluff where Schloss Martheim clung perilously, he had played chess once a week with the frail master of the castle, and a genuine friendship had sprung up between the two. He felt a poignant regret that the delicate ivory chessmen would never reappear from their inlaid box, to be set up carefully by the baron's white, fastidious fingers. More deeply he regretted the cutting off of their conversations over vintage wine, when the game was played out and the fire had lapsed to a bed of ruddy coals. Whatever village gossip said of the baron's early escapades, the doctor had found him, in his old age, a pleasant companion, full of a wise, calm knowledge of men and things. The reserve he maintained concerning his past erected no barrier in their friendship; his occasional fits of abstracted melancholy seldom marred their quiet evenings.

Musing thus upon the end of good things in a bitter world, the doctor came out of the forest and climbed a long flight of steps cut into solid rock. At the top he paused. He was on the terrace of Schloss Martheim; below him the river glittered in the moonlight, and a light or two showed the outskirts of the village. But all about him, barring all the approaches to the castle save the side which looked over the cliff, was the impenetrable black forest, seeming to crowd in upon the *schloss* eagerly, as if sensing an ultimate victory.

The doctor turned and struck the brazen bell that hung beside the oaken door. Before the clamorous echoes had died away, the lone servitor who tended the baron had opened the door to him. In one trembling hand he bore a lighted taper. His face, in the fitful gleam, was twisted with grief.

"Well, Hans? How is he?" questioned the doctor as he stripped off his cloak and gloves.

"He is very low, doctor. All day he has asked for you. He seems afraid. Come quickly; he does not like to be alone."

THEY hastened to the upper chamber where, in the light of a single candle and a leaping fire, the last Baron Martheim awaited death. The doctor, advancing swiftly to the bedside, read in

the transparent waxen face the imminence of dissolution; yet, when his practised fingers touched the blue-veined, fragile wrist, they felt a pulse beating spasmodically, almost tumultuously. As he bent to listen to the weary heart, the old man opened his eyes suddenly.

"Ah, God, is it time already? Have they come? No, not yet! Tell me they have not come!" Unreasoning terror burned in the shadowed, sunken eyes. The voice was a trembling wail.

"It is I, Doctor Gradnov," the doctor hastened to assure him. "No one has come. You must be quiet."

A long sigh lifted the breast beneath the cover. Slowly reason returned to the staring eyes. The baron spoke again.

"Ah, it is good you have come. I must share my secret now. I must tell you . . . you, my only friend." Something like peace came into the wasted features.

"You must not try to talk, Baron," the doctor soothed him. "I will give you a sedative."

He turned to his bag. Hans yet lingered in the background, murmuring prayers under his breath. The baron spoke clearly. "No, I must talk. It is better than thinking . . . waiting. . . . Listen to me, rather, and learn perhaps. I am very tired," he ended pathetically.

The doctor poured out a goblet of brandy from the decanter near by. He held the glass to the dying man's lips; after a few sips a faint tinge of color showed along the cheek-bones. When he spoke again a new strength and purpose were in his shrill voice.

"That is better. You will hear me, then. These forty years I have been haunted, and now the end is drawing near. At last I shall know . . . I shall be rid of dread. . . . Listen. I shall tell you a strange thing, and you will believe."

His thin hands closed over an ebony crucifix which lay on the covers. With an effort he took a deep breath and began.

"When I was young, I was sent to the university, as you were. Like you I was proud of my learning—I was very young. I spent much time boasting in taverns, and I liked the girls. My first year I fell in love with a little girl who waited on us in a café. In this I stupidly crossed another student, an older man whom I disliked because of his loud scorn of my fine theories. I gloated over him one night because Hilda preferred me. He stalked away, but not before I had seen his eyes. . . . He hated me. From that time on we never spoke, but whenever I was near him, I felt his eyes on me. Thus passed two years, and then the third came, and still Ivan remembered. It was in his eyes always."

The doctor administered more brandy. He saw in the sunken sockets eyes that burned with terror and delirium, and his own skin tingled inexplicably.

Revived by the strong liquor, the old man went on, his words coming out in jerks, as though the effort were almost too much. Yet some obscure force drove him on, hurrying his tale as if he were in fear of interruption.

"One night, in deep winter, I lingered in a wine-shop after my companions were gone. It was such a night as this outside, and I hesitated over my last drink. The innkeeper eyed me, for I was alone, and he wished to shut up his shop and go to bed. But as I was about to rise, the door was flung open and a student came in. The light fell across his features; I recognized Ivan.

"A flicker of hatred ran across his face when he saw me; yet he came to my table and asked permission to sit with me civilly enough. We ordered two drinks, and

until the keeper had withdrawn yawning, we said nothing. But then Ivan leaned across the table and said softly, 'Well met, little Konrad! This is well met.'

"Something in his voice sent a chill through me, but I answered him curtly.

" 'What do you mean?' I asked.

" 'For a long time I have wished to ask you something,' he returned, with a little chuckle. 'May I speak with you, little Konrad?'

" 'What is it?'

" 'Do you still deny the existence of the soul?' he demanded earnestly.

"Puzzled, I stared at him. 'Yes, of course,' I replied. 'I have not returned to superstition.'

"Ah, I was young then, and the fine theories were new. I was very proud. . . .

"Ivan nodded at me. 'Then you do not think that one can—sell one's soul?' he asked, more softly still.

" 'What nonsense is this?' I asked in return.

" 'Konrad, I have sold my soul,' he whispered. 'And in return I have learned many things. How you would gasp if you knew! I am wiser than any of you in the classes, for I have learned the secrets of the old ones, the dark secrets. I could show you. . . . Konrad, would you like to see ghosts?'

" 'You are mad,' I said, only half convinced that I spoke the truth. There was something in his eyes that held me listening.

" 'No, learned little Konrad! I tell you it is true, that which I speak. Dare you come with me, and prove it? I will show you the undead, Konrad! I will show you werewolves! Do you dare?' He leaned forward, and his breath was hot on my face.

"I tried to laugh, and could only shudder. He saw it, and laughed mockingly.

" 'Konrad is afraid,' he taunted. 'Konrad knows that I speak truth, and he is afraid. Poor little Konrad!'

"He laughed in my face, but his eyes did not laugh. They held me, fascinated.

" 'No! I am not afraid,' I told him harshly.

" 'Then come with me, now, and laugh at me when you are proved right,' he invited, rising.

"I felt my whole being revolt with nameless dread, but I rose with him. As if he held me chained, I followed him into the street. The inn door shut behind us sharply."

ONCE again the narrative broke off, and the room was silent save for the old man's gasping breath. The doctor moistened the dry lips with brandy again. Terror was a living flame in the eyes now, the only living thing in the wasted body, save the lips, which scarcely moved to allow the husky voice to go on. The chill presence of death, and something more horrible still, filled the room with vague, fantastic shapes of dream.

"For a long time we walked, so swiftly that I hardly managed to keep pace with Ivan. We followed an icy-rutted track into the forest that hedged the town, far into the dark deeps of it, where I had never penetrated before. Overhead the stars were bright as sparks, and the moonlight was white. Sometimes Ivan threw back his head and laughed up at the stars, silently, but he did not speak. As I hastened by his side and thought of flight, I sensed the presence of beasts near us. I heard little rustles in the brush, and a snapping of twigs, and even a muffled whine. A new fear seized me: the wolves were abroad in packs because of the deep cold. I dared not turn back. We went on, interminably.

"At last we reached a clearing, and I

saw in the moonlight the dark pile of such a castle as this. But it was deserted, as this will be; it was falling into ruin. Against the bare stone walls the icy vines clattered sharply, like clicking bones. I heard Ivan curse as his skin was torn on the cold metal of the lock. Then the door opened, and we were inside, in the musty dark.

"Ivan led me, groping and stumbling, down many corridors to a room which had one casement, a glimmering dimness across the room. I stood with my back to the door, trying to conquer the fear that tore at my vitals. I was glad when Ivan managed to light a candle and set it in a sconce on the wall. By its light I made out the furnishings—a great chest, a rough table, and over all the dead dust of years.

"Ivan did not pause. From the chest he took out a brazier, a bronze bowl, and some little boxes and vials. Also he laid on the table a great old pistol that gleamed in the light. Then from a pocket he drew a folded parchment. This also he laid upon the table before he turned to me.

" 'So, now we are ready,' he smiled evilly. 'No, not quite; we have forgotten.' He picked up the pistol and put it in my hand. 'Listen, now,' he said. 'You know the legend of the werewolf. A human may take shape as a wolf during life, but at his death he becomes one of the undead. He may be slain for ever only by a silver bullet blessed and marked with a cross. This you know?'

"I nodded, dumbly.

" 'Here!' he said, and I stretched out my hand. He dropped a bullet into it. It was of silver, and graven into it was a cross.

" 'You do not believe in souls,' he mocked. 'Yet it will kill a human as quickly as any other bullet. Load the pistol, little Konrad, and we shall begin. I would not take advantage of you. Yet remember—if you fire at a werewolf with such a bullet, and miss, your soul is forfeit to the undead! So it is written.' Abruptly he turned to the table and bent to his task.

"I do not remember all that he did; yet he mixed some powders and liquids from his store, and set the bowl of them over the brazier. The flame licked around the metal bluely; smoke began to rise thinly. As it thickened, Ivan took up the parchment and began to chant. A scent as of burning flesh filled the room. I could not move or speak; I was as if in the clutch of a hideous nightmare. The chant deepened and swelled; it was like some diabolic distortion of the Mass. And now a sinister accompaniment began to sound above and around the shuddering chant; I recognized it as the howl of a hungry wolf outside.

"With a swift movement Ivan flung open the casement; the candle guttered out in the draft. The room was full of stinging smoke. Ivan's chant ended in a deep quavering howl. The answer swelled from all the forest outside. For an interminable second I stood in the smoky dark, my nostrils choked with the vile odor, my eyes blinded, my limbs weak as water. And then I sensed that evil indescribable had entered the room, unearthly evil, perilous and near.

"I strove to pierce the gloom. Through the smoke I caught the gleam of green, baleful eyes. They came toward me slowly, crouching near the floor. I heard a snarl of hatred through the wild chorus outside. I knew, then. I was alone with a beast. . . .

"He sprang as I fired, and I felt his fangs in my flesh as the pistol kicked out of my hand in the recoil. . . . I do not remember anything else."

THE old man's forehead was cold and wet with the death-sweat, but his desperate, inexorable voice went on, faltering now and weak, yet relentlessly driving to an end.

"I came to myself in the dawn, wandering the streets with a shirt caked with blood from a wound in my chest. I crept to my lodgings, packed my bags, and fled the town by the first coach. I came here, and besought my mother for money. Though her heart broke at the sight of me, and my decision never to return to school, she gave me all she had, and promised to send enough for me to live on. Thus I wandered across the earth for years, seeking the tropics and the sea. . . . In time my father died. I came home, but too late to find my mother waiting. They were both in the old chapel, together and asleep.

"I wandered again, seeking to forget. Useless; never have I told any man the terror that has dogged my footsteps all these years, that has lain down with me and risen with me, that even in sleep has returned to gibber at me through the nights. God, how long has been my penance! And now it comes to an end . . . an end! Ah, God, be merciful!"

He ended on a choked sob of fear. The doctor sought uselessly for words that might bring a decent peace to this fantastic deathbed.

"Here you are safe," he urged. "None can harm you. There are no werewolves, Baron. You are safe."

"Safe? God, that I might believe it! But I can not know . . . I can not tell. Listen!" he cried out.

Rigid with stark terror, his hands clutching at the doctor's arm, he pulled himself half erect. A bloody foam stained his pallid lips. They listened. Even Hans, shivering and crouching by the door, ceased his muttered prayers. There was no sound anywhere, within or without.

"There is nothing. Lie quiet," the doctor begged. The old man clung to him with maniacal strength.

"You do not understand!" he shrieked. "They will come. . . . They are coming . . . black shapes in the moonlight, with lolling tongues . . . I see them. . . . I did not kill that night . . . I fired . . . Ivan lives! He has come for my soul. . . . Pray for me, my friend . . . pray——"

A paroxysm shook the frail body in the doctor's arms. The old man's face twisted into a staring mask of horror, and his hands clawed at the coverings, as though he would fight off some unseen shape. His breath ended in a rattle. It was over.

The doctor lowered the baron's body back to the bed. For a full minute there was utter stillness in the room, as though the watchers had been stricken breathless. And then, from the forest outside, a long bitter howl lifted and swelled, the howl of a hungry wolf, sobbing with inhuman despair. Three times it shivered to the startled stars, filling the night with echoes of pulsing horror. Within the *schloss*, after the last echo had died for ever, there was only the sound of old Hans, sobbing, and the voice of the doctor muttering in unaccustomed prayer.

A Matter of Faith

By AUGUST W. DERLETH and MARK SCHORER

An African story of weird native magic and the ghastly fate known as the Blue Death

MAJOR JOHN LESLIE was standing on the veranda when his houseman came running rapidly across the open space before the bungalow. Seeing the major, the negro came to a halt beyond the veranda and looked up, shading his eyes from the hot sun of the African noon.

"White men come," he said. "Along trail. Soon be here now," he added.

Major Leslie swore under his breath. Now what the devil was up? Commissioner not satisfied again? Hell! "All right," he said. "I'm ready for 'em."

He shaded his eyes and looked down the trail. Heat waves rose up from the ground and near-by foliage. The major dabbed at his forehead with a bedraggled white handkerchief.

The negro moved effortlessly back into the encroaching jungle and was gone. Presently he was back again, his black face confronting the major from beyond the veranda rail. "Big man," said the negro.

"How, big man?" asked Major Leslie.

The negro raised his hand above his head.

Leslie nodded. A tall man. Colonel Christy, perhaps? He pointed to his upper lip. "Hair?" he asked.

The negro nodded.

Colonel Christy all right. The commissioner was on his ear. He looked up as the party of two white men and some natives came into the open space before the bungalow. Major Leslie stepped off the veranda and went to meet them. Sour old Christy, he thought.

"Hello, Christy," he called.

The colonel waved at him, though they were close together. "Well, Major Leslie. Still here, I see." He jerked his head backward and to one side, and said, "Mr. Howard Chett, Major Leslie."

Howard Chett was a small insignificant man compared to the colonel; a pale copy, thought Leslie. As the major took his hand, he wondered whether Chett was another of the commissioner's best men.

"Hellish hot," offered Chett.

"My man's getting refreshments," said the major, as they stepped on to the veranda.

Sitting over their refreshments, Colonel Christy suddenly displayed a willingness to talk. "This native business, now, Leslie," he said. "What's been done?"

Major Leslie shrugged. "They're still stirred up about something. Nothing's been done. Best to leave 'em alone when they're in this state."

Colonel Christy made a wry face. Lord! thought the major, now I'll get the works again. The colonel said, "Understand, Leslie, the commissioner does not want to carp about your work, but what he can not understand is why you've let this thing drag out so long. If the natives are making trouble, you have only to signal the near-by fort and soldiers will be sent you immediately."

"I don't think it's a matter of soldiers," said the major.

"Of course, I'm no judge," continued the colonel. "Your report came in marked 'Native unrest', and, knowing the commissioner, you can imagine how that struck him."

The major had no difficulty imagining the commissioner reading his report—that tremendously heavy man peering at the paper over his pince-nez, saying, "Here's Leslie writing 'Native unrest', and I'll wager something's gone seriously wrong. Good old Leslie; doesn't want to worry us about it; wants to spare us the details. You'd best take a run up there, Christy." Major Leslie sighed.

"That's just what it is," he said. "The natives are restless. I think it's about that sacrificial dancing we've forbidden; it was this time of the year that the thing came off."

"The appearance of a few soldiers might put a quick stop to their restlessness."

"To the contrary, rather," objected Major Leslie quickly. "This native religion is something we should never have interfered with—not to this extent, anyway."

Colonel Christy wet his lips and smiled sardonically. "And allow them to continue their charming diversions, such as the not infrequent sacrifice of white men?"

"What I should have said," continued the major, "was that we should have made them see that the sacrifice of any more white men would be seriously punished, and allowed them to know that if they wanted to use some of their own people in such a fashion, the British government was not exactly all-seeing."

"Approving barbarity, Leslie?" put in the colonel icily.

HOWARD CHETT, who had up to this time remained silent, came to Major Leslie's aid. "I think you're doing the major an injustice, Colonel," he said. "I believe he means to infer that we should have remained blind to native barbarity in their own ranks until we had a strong enough hold over this region to take the necessary steps. In that I agree."

Colonel Christy bowed gracefully. "Nevertheless," he said, "there's something you're withholding, Leslie—something that's bothering you. You're afraid to interfere with the natives, when I believe you more than suspect that there will be a sacrifice at the forbidden dances this year. Why are you doing nothing?"

Major Leslie looked away. "I think you know me well enough to remember that fear is a faculty which I lack almost entirely," he said.

Colonel Christy nodded somewhat impatiently. "I admire your personal bravery, Leslie. But there's something causing you to sit tight and do nothing, something beyond your mere belief that the Government shouldn't interfere."

"Yes," said Major Leslie reluctantly, "there is something."

"Out with it," snapped the colonel.

"I've been out here for some time," the major went on, "and I came here with preconceived ideas, some of which I've had to change. One of these ideas has to do with certain primitive powers of the natives, out-of-the-way knowledge these people have and use."

Colonel Christy struck the table with the palm of his hand. "I'd have credited you with more sense, Leslie," he cut in. "Fallen for the supernatural!"

"I've done no such thing," said the major curtly. "I'm unwilling to mix up in an affair which is sacred to the natives, yes; I'll add that it's because I don't want to come up against such an unknown and

dangerous thing as the knowledge of deadly natural secrets which some of us know they have. I'm not expressing myself on the supernatural element, but I *know* that these people have a certain primitive power which enables them to bring about certain things."

Colonel Christy gazed steadily at Major Leslie. "Very well," he said finally. "I accept your position. Tell me what you've done about this native unrest."

"Their witch-doctor, who is empowered to deal with me, is coming at dawn tomorrow morning to see me."

"His name?"

"He calls himself Mbuana."

"Good. When he comes tomorrow, I'll represent the Government and deal with him."

Major Leslie shrugged. "You know best what you want to do, but please go carefully with Mbuana, and don't arouse his anger. I've a certain faith in their primitive powers, even if you haven't."

At dawn, Major Leslie was definitely uneasy. His houseman tapped lightly on the door and slipped into the room without waiting for the major to call him.

"Mbuana angry," he said.

The major made a wry face. "Is he on the way?" he asked.

"Start soon as I come."

"Very well; get the others up."

MBUANA, a wrinkled old native, now gaudily painted a ghastly combination of blue and white with a dash of red on his face, was strutting to and fro in the clearing before the bungalow when the three men came to meet him. He had with him four natives who were scarcely clothed in comparison to his own trappings.

Colonel Christy motioned Leslie and Chett back and went forward alone. Mbuana watched in amazement, having done all his previous dealing with Leslie. He seemed to grasp, however, that a new man was temporarily in charge, and hesitatingly went forward to meet him.

For a few moments the two stood together talking. Then Colonel Christy must have said something displeasing, for Mbuana stalked away, shouting unintelligibly. The colonel stood his ground, and presently the witch-doctor came back. He was smiling. Seeing the smile, Major Leslie became more uneasy. Then again Mbuana exploded and stalked away. When he returned, he ignored the colonel, and came directly to Major Leslie on the veranda.

He stood before the major proudly and made a curious little bow. Major Leslie dabbed at his forehead apprehensively, inwardly groaning, Now Christy's done it, oh, Lord!

Mbuana flung his arm outward, pointing to the colonel. His painted mouth opened derisively. "That one stands between us," he said.

"He comes before me," replied Major Leslie. "We must bow to his wishes. I can do nothing."

Mbuana paused a moment to puzzle this out. The major's houseman repeated it to him in the native dialect. Mbuana frowned angrily. He turned to look once more at the colonel and again at the major's flushed, uneasy face. Then he shot out a quick sentence in the dialect, and turned away.

The major's houseman faltered, and his black face seemed to go pale. He began to breathe jerkily, and the major was alarmed. "What's the matter?" he asked sharply.

As Mbuana disappeared in the jungle growth beyond the clearing, the houseman said, "Mbuana say he will send for colonel tonight. Make sacrifice of colonel at festival of snakes."

The colonel, who had come up in time to hear the negro's translation, snapped, "Rot! How can you stand there and believe that? You ought to see yourself, Leslie, brave as you are, gone completely white."

LATER in the day, Major Leslie said, "I don't suppose it would do any good to persuade you to start the trek back today—before nightfall."

"It wouldn't," replied the colonel sharply.

Chett supplemented, "It's not like the colonel to retreat under any kind of threat."

"This is different," said the major earnestly. "Really, it is. I can tell you stories."

"Proof?" cut in the colonel.

"Things happened, but there was never any proof. There was the case of Captain Bruce, just forty miles away. Those damned natives got him when he bucked them."

"How?"

"They threatened him just as Mbuana threatened you today. That night he was found dead—an animal had bitten him, they said."

"I remember the official report," put in Chett. "An animal had bitten him. But surely there's nothing strange about that?"

"Not on the face of it. But the report neglected to mention that every conceivable opening had been closed."

"Then how did the animal get in?"

"Bruce let him in. His man told me about it later. He let him in—wasn't himself at all. Under some spell, of course. He also let the animal out again; then he died. Remember, he was found dead just before the door."

"Nonsense!"

"Not at all. More than once I've noticed that these natives with whom we're dealing are far advanced over their neighbors. For one thing, they do have a strange hypnotic power; I've seen it in practise in their festivals."

Colonel Christy looked skeptical, but Chett was nodding.

"They have an amazing knowledge of natural science," Leslie went on. "They know infinitely more about the flora and fauna of these jungles than any botanist who's ever studied them." He paused for a moment. "Colonel Christy," he asked presently, "do you remember the strange disappearance of that whole little tribe called the Umgabis? Ever have an explanation of that?"

"No, but I don't see how that connects——"

Leslie broke in. "Our natives were at odds with them at the time; it's my firm belief that they were directly responsible for the disappearance of that tribe."

"What do you mean?"

"It's not only the magic they know, nor the knowledge they have that sets them above their fellows. It's the nature of their weapons as well. Blowguns aren't unusual in these parts, but it's the ammunition of their blowguns that's peculiar."

"What do they use?" grunted the colonel.

"I don't know," said Leslie. "I wish I did. I think I could solve more than one mystery if I knew."

At that moment the major's houseman came into the room. He was trembling. "Thing has come for colonel," he said, averting his eyes from Colonel Christy as if he were a dead man.

"What thing?" demanded the colonel, angrily raising his voice.

"Thing from Mbuana. Outside."

"Bring it in," said the major.

The negro shook his head. "No touch. Thing for colonel."

The colonel came to his feet. "What the hell! I'm getting damned tired of this half-paralyzing fear of something that doesn't exist. Where is the thing?"

"One moment, Colonel Christy," interposed the major. "Do me the favor of leaving that thing just where it is, will you?"

"Why?"

"Can't you do it without knowing why?"

"Sorry, Leslie, but I can't."

"Very well. It's because that thing is sent to establish a link between you and Mbuana. Without your touching it, he can do nothing to you. Captain Bruce got one before he was killed."

Colonel Christy flushed angrily. He pushed past Major Leslie and went out on the veranda, where the negro had indicated the thing lay.

"There," said Leslie hopelessly, "I knew he'd get it if I told him. Anyway, I warned him."

Chett looked at him, puzzled, hesitant. Major Leslie thought, That poor fool doesn't believe it either. But the major was surprized by what Chett said a moment later.

"There've been a good many half-legends about this tribe, Major, some of which have come even to my ears. You know, our Doctor Handol some time ago brought in word of a peculiar sort of disease called the 'blue death'—always fatal, I think. I must confess I didn't understand his report—something about deadly microbes, encysted. . . ."

A light broke suddenly over Leslie's face; he started to speak, but before he could utter a sound, Colonel Christy stalked into the room, the thing in his hands. It was nothing more than a small stick with a knob at one end; it might have been a drumstick, but it was too heavy for that. At its base was a crudely done carving of a voodoo emblem, and to it was attached a piece of animal skin on which had been drawn a picture of a tall man, indicating that the stick was for Colonel Christy.

"So that is to put me *en rapport,* is it?" said the colonel. He threw the thing violently to the floor; then he picked it up again. In the silence that fell, the colonel walked away with the stick in his pocket.

Major Leslie said, "Listen, Chett; will you stick with me?"

Chett nodded barely perceptibly.

"We must not let Colonel Christy out of our sight tonight, you and I. If he steps outside the house, he's lost. You look as if everything were incredible, but I feel you've as much faith in this primitive power as I have. Keep it, will you, and do just as I say tonight."

Again Chett nodded.

"We must take turns guarding his door. He mustn't know, or he wouldn't have it. Will you help?"

"I will."

"Good. I'll get my houseman to watch at the window."

As MAJOR LESLIE came away from Colonel Christy's door at the end of his second watch, the sky was streaked with the dull red banners of the swiftly coming dawn. He felt very tired and unsure of himself. Chett had whispered, "Is everything all right?" Yes, thank God, everything was still all right.

In his own room he sank into a chair, sighing his relief. The danger would not be so great now, he felt. His head sank lower on his chest; he was tired.

He came out of his doze suddenly. His houseman was shaking him. "Quick! Colonel gone. Colonel out."

Leslie came to his feet, paused just long enough to pick up two revolvers he'd

taken out for this emergency, and ran into the hall. What the devil had happened to Chett? Chett lay on the floor, feebly rubbing his head. As the major came up to him, he sat up.

"Christy hit me," he groaned. "I tried to stop him, and before I knew it, he'd hit me."

The major did not pause to comment. He handed one of the revolvers to Chett, and ran on, calling back, "Come on, come on."

Chett struggled to his feet and came after him. The houseman had gone ahead, pointing the way.

Colonel Christy was walking slowly toward the dense foliage fringing the clearing before the bungalow. The major and Chett ran swiftly toward him. "Keep him from the trees, for God's sake," called the major hoarsely. "He isn't himself—see the thing in his hand."

In his right hand the colonel was carrying the drumstick thing that Mbuana had sent. He was very close to the jungle foliage now, and the major spurted forward.

"He's hypnotized—Mbuana's hypnotized him!"

Then suddenly Mbuana leaped out from the edge of the jungle, fantastic and startling in the gray-red light of the dawn. Seeing the others coming behind the colonel, he stopped dead, whipped something to his mouth and away.

Major Leslie's revolver spoke out sharply. Mbuana faltered for a moment, then wheeled about and dived back into the heavy foliage. Colonel Christy stood still on the spot where he was when Mbuana jumped from the brush.

Leslie and Chett, with the houseman at their heels, ran past him into the jungle. Ahead of them they heard Mbuana crashing through the dense foliage, stumbling over cracking branches. Again Leslie's gun spat, this time in the direction of Mbuana's retreat.

Emerging suddenly in an open space, they saw the witch-doctor writhing on the ground, his body twisted painfully. He cried out something, and then, as the blood spurted up through his lips, relaxed abruptly in death.

They stood for a moment looking down at the witch-doctor. Then the major turned, glancing quickly at Chett, "Come on, Chett, let's see to the colonel."

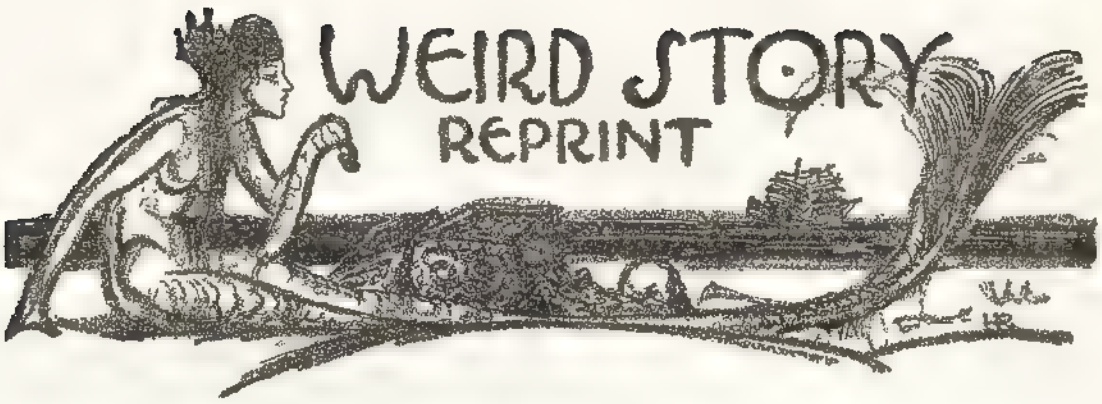
"Right."

Major Leslie and Chett broke from the jungle into the clearing before the bungalow. Colonel Christy was not there. "Must have gone to the bungalow," murmured Chett.

Chett went ahead. He had not gone two steps before he heard Major Leslie's choking exclamation, "My God!" He wheeled and came back to where the major was standing.

Major Leslie's unsteady finger was pointing downward.

On the ground was a large patch of blue slime, moving gently like the surface of a disturbed pond of water, undulating over the ground, rapidly vanishing before their eyes. In the center of the blue patch lay the wrist-watch Colonel Christy had been wearing, glistening brightly in the light of the breaking day.



Pale Pink Porcelain*

By FRANK OWEN

TSANG KEE FOO was an artist in porcelain. His house in Kingtehchen, the porcelain capital of China, was filled with exquisite specimens of porcelain art that no museum could surpass. The family of Tsang Kee Foo had all been potters dating back for almost a thousand years. Somewhere a book is written on the lineage of this renowned artist, though trace of it has been lost. Perhaps some day it will be located and much data about this ancient family will be given to the world.

Tsang Kee Foo was tall and slim and round-shouldered from constantly stooping over his wheel. His face, colorless and bleached, looked as though it had been dried by the furnaces that baked his delicate porcelains. He was superbly well-educated, a profound linguist and efficient in all the supreme literatures of the world. One of his ambitions was to translate the musings of Long Chik, the poet, into pottery. For each quatrain a vase, an urn or a traced-bowl. He believed in the possibility of his desire, since all arts are interchangeable. It was his knowledge of quaint tales and folklore that gave Tsang Kee Foo his charming personality. What mattered that he was cold and ruthless, that he could pass starving children on the streets without so much as a glance, or that he permitted his own sister to die of want simply because once in her youth she had criticized his handiwork?

The face of Tsang Kee Foo was a mask, and few there were who knew the mind behind it. He was successful, rich, an artist. It was enough.

Now as he sat at the door of his house he felt great contentment. He was snatching a moment's rest for his family from the ceaseless toil that had gone on for almost a thousand years. Listlessly he watched the coolies trotting past laden down with porcelain-ware which they were taking to the furnaces to be baked. Not many factories in Kingtehchen could boast furnaces, for most of the pottery was made in the homes of the people. Almost every house was a factory, and even tiny children were skilled in the ceramic art. But Tsang Kee Foo was rich. He had his own furnaces for baking. Life was very good.

* From "The Wind that Tramps the World and Other Stories." Copyright 1929 by the Lantern Press, Inc.

In this he eclipsed Lu Chau, his greatest rival. Lu Chau was equally as skilful, but he did not own his own furnace. Tsang Kee Foo hated Lu Chau, though he always greeted him with a smile and welcomed him to his home. In cordiality he treated him as a brother. Yet deep within him was buried a burning hatred, a hatred that burned as surely as the pine-wood in his furnaces. For one thing, Lu Chau was handsome. He was possessed of a beauty that made all women his slaves. They looked up into his black almond eyes, into his face which was like a full moon, and listened to the flattery that dripped ever from his lips; and at once they were lost in a surging sea of desire. Lu Chau's attraction for women was as famous as his fine porcelains. In ordinary circumstances Tsang Kee Foo would not have cared for the talk which Lu Chau caused, were it not that Lu Chau was infatuated with the lovely Mei-Mei, a China girl as gorgeous as any bit of porcelain.

That poet of old must have been thinking of Mei-Mei when he wrote:

> Her voice makes perfume when she speaks,
> Her breath is music faint and low.

The lovely Mei-Mei was a product of porcelain, even as were Tsang Kee Foo and Lu Chau. The very foundation of her family, of her house, was built on porcelain. But she paid no attention whatever to the modeling of cups and vases. Her concern was solely with the painting of them. Most of her vases were decorated with Yunnan blue and yellow, though other colors also were used upon occasion. Mei-Mei ground all her own colors from rock crystals, arsenic, copper, lead and pewter. No colorist was ever more adept than she. Her creations were justly famous. It was said that she infused her personality into her creations. Each bit of pottery reflected her mood. When she was melancholy, so was the jar. When love, desire or laughter enveloped her it found reflection in her work. Whether all the quaint tales that were recounted about her were true or not, they served to emphasize her popularity. If all the great artists of China were put down, the name of Mei-Mei would have to be among them.

With all her colors she was satisfied, with the sole exception of pink. The pale pink color which she desired was hard to locate. There were many types of red, but not the elusive pink for which she had sought in vain for years.

LU CHAU wooed her with vast enthusiasm. He was always smiling.

"For ever I will stand guard over you," he declared, "like an old gingko tree if you will but pause to listen to my voice. Marry me and I will fashion wondrous pottery for you to paint."

Tsang Kee Foo was equally as vehement in his wooing. He quoted to her all the love songs of the poets. He brought flowers to her of rare elegance.

"When we are wed," he declared, "life thereafter will be but one superb poem of loveliness. Greater than Kutani-ware is the porcelain of Mei-Mei and greater than the love of any other is my love for you. It is like an endless lyric poem, or a brook that flows on for ever through the ages. When the sun ceases to rise yellow over China, then only will my devotion fade."

Mei-Mei smiled. She sang softly to herself as she worked at her art. She was decorating a vase with ivory-white and mirror-black. Close beside her was one of great beauty in celadon.

"Who first brings to me the secret of the pale pink color that I crave," she murmured, "to him will I surrender and to none other. Marriage at best is a subjection of womanhood and I can only

submit to it if my reward does justify it. Love is a poem, but poems can be repeated to many people. My love is a color, pale pink like the blush of the morning, pink like the cheek of a happy woman, pink like the sky when day is dying. Your reward will be great if you win me; mine must be great by proportion."

TSANG KEE FOO returned to his house. He locked himself in his workroom for days seeking the secret of that wondrous color. His enthusiasm was great, but no greater than that of Lu Chau even though Lu Chau was not so adept at concentration. While pining for the wondrous Mei-Mei he was not blind to the charms of other women. He studied profoundly, but his amours were in like proportion.

Frequently Lu Chau stopped at the home of Tsang Kee Foo. He was extremely polite, but the essence of politeness he affected did not dull the edge of his cynicism. He angered Tsang Kee Foo to an acute degree by assuming that in the end he himself would win the prize. All women were as flowers that bent to every breeze, and the love of Lu Chau was as subtle as wind in the willows.

He walked about the rooms of Tsang Kee Foo, fingering his porcelains, eulogizing their perfection and beauty. Occasionally he drew attention to a slight defect in one. At other times he was loud in his praise. But the porcelains he praised were always the ones Tsang Kee Foo had not wrought, while those in which he detected defects were always the works of his friend.

This goaded Tsang Kee Foo to great fury, but there was nothing in his bland expression that reflected his inward turbulence. He knew that he was a far better artist than Lu Chau, except in one thing—the frailties of women.

"Women," reflected Lu Chau, "are much like porcelain: a single flaw and they are worthless."

He was perfectly complacent. He was handsome and he knew it. China girls loved to gaze upon his moon-like face. His kisses were valued. In love, he was supreme. The ceramic art was only secondary. Every other art was subordinate to love. Some day he would marry Mei-Mei. The future was pleasant to contemplate. Not for a moment did he question his ultimate success. Lu Chau did not fail in love.

It enervated his spirits to talk to Tsang Kee Foo. He was a rival to be derided, not to be feared. What woman could fail to choose Lu Chau, given the choice between them?

He handled the cups, the bowls and the vases carefully. Tsang Kee Foo was an artist, a ceramic-artist, not a love-artist. He was eloquent, his words were honeyed but his face was like a bleached dried lime.

Meanwhile Tsang Kee Foo sat and gazed up toward the lantern above his head. He made no rejoinder to Lu Chau's witticisms except an occasional grunt. He reclined seemingly at ease upon a divan. But there was no rest in his mind. He could be patient. Ultimately his time would come.

THE baking-furnaces of Tsang Kee Foo were in a separate house at the foot of his garden. There all the splendid potteries that had brought renown to him were baked. It was one of the few private furnaces in Kingtehchen. Even Lu Chau with all his swagger had no furnace. He was forced to send his wares through the crowded streets with all the other throngs of potters. Lu Chau was handsome, successful with women, but he had no bake-ovens. He was simply one of the com-

mon herd. Tsang Kee Foo smiled. There was more provocation for mirth in the thought than in any of the witticisms of Lu Chau.

"Now we are rivals," mused Tsang Kee Foo. "Perhaps one of us will attain to the hand of Mei-Mei. And because I wish to put no obstacle in your way I offer to you the privilege of using my bake-ovens for your experiments. Let us be rivals but not enemies. If it comes to pass that you discover the pale pink color before I do, then will I bow my head and pray to the spirits and the dragons to bestow happiness upon you and to guard your footsteps well."

Lu Chau was surprized. He arched his eyebrows. "You speak in a manner befitting a great artist," he commented, "and I will accept your kind offer. It would indeed be a crime to refuse a suggestion coming from a heart so overflowing with bounty. Let me then be less than the least coolie in your household. If I offend by being in your shop too often, have me cast from your door."

Tsang Kee Foo smiled. He blinked his eyes as though the light were strong, the light, perhaps, of his own benevolence.

"And now," he said, "I will take you to the rear of my garden to inspect my furnaces. They are not perfect, but they are adequate. Such as they are, I offer them to you."

Together they strolled out into the garden.

The air struck their faces delightfully cool. The sun was a yellow maze. It poured down in golden splendor on the lilacs and peonies, on the pink oleanders and lotuses that sweetened the air. About the walks were stately trees, Chinese ash and scented pine. The air was as fragrant as the spice-laden air of Cambodia. Beneath the trees several stone benches beckoned one to loiter. It made incongruous the fact that at the foot of the garden were the furnaces of intense heat in which pottery was baked. The pine fires were never out. They continued onward as surely as the moon. In this same spot the family of Tsang Kee Foo had flourished for a thousand years, had clung tenaciously to life through famine and flood, through pestilence and death. There was something admirable about it, something superb.

Tsang Kee Foo opened the door of his shop and bade Lu Chau enter. He was very polite, very formal. No race can match the Chinese in courtesy, no Chinaman could eclipse Tsang Kee Foo, poet and potter and lover of Mei-Mei.

At one end of the shop was the great door that led to the bake-ovens. Lu Chau walked close to it. His interest was sincere. Cupidity lighted up his eyes. He was to receive the use of these ovens free.

Tsang Kee Foo opened the great door. The blast that came from the oven was like that of a swirling volcano.

"I have a dozen vases baking within at the present time," he said, "but there is room for very many more. Stand closer so that you can appreciate its capacity."

Lu Chau stepped forward that he might peer with greater intensity. As he did so Tsang Kee Foo caught him about the waist and pushed him into the oven. The shriek which Lu Chau emitted was drowned as the great iron door swung shut.

WITHOUT haste or trepidation Tsang Kee Foo returned to his garden. The air was fragrant with lotuses. He plucked a carnation from a bush and touched it to his nostrils. Never, he thought, had the wisteria blossoms appeared to greater advantage. He seated himself upon a bench near a willow tree. His soul was filled with poetry. Quat-

rains like jewels were chasing themselves through his consciousness. He thought of the lovely Mei-Mei. When they were wed it would be an excellent triumph for the art of ceramics. What wondrous vases they would be able to create together! He listlessly picked up a ripe pomegranate that had fallen to the ground. Love was as delicious as the seeds of that luscious fruit, sweeter than honey and almonds, or sandalwood and myrrh.

Now Lu Chau would bother him no more. No longer would he be forced to bear the bite of his sarcasms, of his boastings, nor to listen to the quaint tales he told of amorous Chinese maidens who could not resist his allure. The future had taken on a rosy hue, somewhat akin to that pale pink color of Chinese porcelain for which Mei-Mei yearned.

Until the moon rose that night he remained in his garden, until the soft flush of sunset had blended into the purpling folds of night. The scent of lotuses sweetened, the breeze intensified, the stars bloomed out like wondrous lanterns hanging in the sky. The world was suffused in a riot of beauty. Tsang Kee Foo rose to his feet. He sang wildly in his ecstasy. He crooned love songs to the moon.

Even unto dawn he remained in his garden. For his eyes there was no sleep. He wished simply to breathe in that perfume of joy for ever. He refreshed his face by crushing it into a large wild rose on which the cool night dew was heavy.

When the hour of noon approached he went to the studio of Mei-Mei. He bowed low as he entered, arrayed in the costliest of his satin costumes.

"Surely," he cried, "I must be permanently protected from hardship and danger by a Spirit Screen. Beloved am I of the gods, for in all this universe I am the one appointed to gain the love of Mei-Mei."

As he spoke he drew from his cloak a vase, exquisite in workmanship and of a soft pale pink color that surpassed in splendor the glory of dawn or the cheek of a lovely woman. Mei-Mei uttered a little cry as she seized the vase and fell upon her knees to study its elusive color more easily. Her eyes were of dazzling brightness and her heart beat with supreme excitement. It was that immortal hour for which she had waited years.

Tsang Kee Foo stood beside her, as majestic as a gingko tree. He did not tell her that Lu Chau existed no longer, that his blood had colored the vase. He could not explain how the miracle had come to pass, nor did he try to. It was sufficient that the vase was pink. He had offered Lu Chau the use of his ovens. Lu Chau had rewarded him for his generosity.

At last Mei-Mei rose to her feet. "It is the color," she whispered. "Nowhere else have I beheld it except in the necklace of peculiar workmanship which Lu Chau always wore about his neck. When he returns, I will marry you, even as my word was given. But I can not do so until Lu Chau admits that I have kept faith. Lu Chau is a cultured gentleman. I know that he will accept defeat gracefully."

THE latest story by C. L. Moore, *The Black God's Kiss,* has evoked much enthusiasm among you, the readers, for Jirel of Joiry, the author's new heroine. But the fact that the author has built the story around a new central character has led many of our readers to fear that C. L. Moore has thrown Northwest Smith into the discard. This is not so; for Northwest Smith, the redoubtable hero of *Shambleau, Black Thirst,* and other stories, will shortly return to our pages in a story called *Julhi,* in which he undergoes weird adventures quite as thrilling and breath-taking as any in the preceding stories by C. L. Moore.

Miniature Jewels of Fiction

Ernest M. Smola, of New York City, writes: "Clark Ashton Smith's story, *The Seven Geases,* readily rates first place in the October issue, enumerating forgotten phases of evolution in backward sequence and eminently suitable as a subtle Sunday sermon for us, the conceited humanity of the 'outer world.' It being rather difficult to allocate the next best place to the other miniature jewels of stunning fiction, I would second the motion (already voiced) against stories of other planets; likewise against the visualization of mindless robots, duplicating futile efforts of the late lamented Atlanteans. The contributors to WT must have been masters of occult sciences in former incarnations—as good an explanation of their uncanny flashes of true insight and vivid style as any."

Rainbow-Colored Ink

Louis C. Smith, of Oakland, California, writes: "Permit the entrance to the Eyrie of yet another fan from this district which fairly teems with the creatures. No laboriously detailed criticism is this, but rather a letter dealing in generalities. First, Brundage. By all means keep her. Pastel work—and especially such pastel work as Mrs. Brundage does—is a rare and unusual treat on a magazine cover. I can't truly tell you how really great I think her covers are: I'd have to write in rainbow-colored ink to make my praise colorful enough. . . . I challenge anyone with desire for combat to produce a magazine in the fiction field whose covers are more skilfully done. No—the work of Mrs. Brundage is not perfect—I have found fault with it myself at times, but only with the anatomical details of her subjects, not with their state of dress or undress, or their artistic worth. Now about this latest bombshell to burst so suddenly and astoundingly in our horror-seeking midst: C. L. Moore. More power to you! You have introduced a refreshing, vitally alive, human character whose actions are presented to us in a very capable, wholly artistic way. With Smith, Williamson, Howard and Merritt, you now hold a much-deserved place of honor at the ladder's top rung. You have that rare gift possessed by only a few—the ability to tell a tale of utter horror so that even the most blasé of us shudder, and to do it in a style which is at the same time polished, colorful and lacking all trace of amateurishness."

More Stories of Northwest Smith

Herb Hock, of Frackville, Pennsylvania, writes: "I ask for more Northwest Smith stories by C. L. Moore. I read *Shambleau* and *Black Thirst,* and in my opinion they were among the best stories I have ever read. I read *The Black God's Kiss* too, but I do not like Jirel of Joiry nearly so well as Northwest Smith; neither do I like the settings of Moore's new stories as well as the settings of

(Please turn to page 778)

Coming Next Month

BROCK glanced curiously up at the tree branches above us. "Say—that's queer. These branches are moving, and there isn't a breath of air to stir them!"

And just at that instant the arboreal trap was sprung.

"Run!" I choked, leaping away from the sinister, purplish bole.

But I was too late—as were the others. Down around us like a purple web drooped the lower tree branches. Like hungry, purple mouths, the budding flowers yawned toward us. Whip-like tendrils caught and clung at our legs, our arms, our bodies.

"Help——" I choked.

But Brock and Ticknor were in peril as deadly as my own. It was every man to take care of himself.

The purple tree was rocking as though a gale of wind tossed it. The tendrils crawled like things of flesh over our bodies, to be followed by thicker, more powerful branches.

I heard Brock panting and shouting as he sought with his great hands to tear loose from the clutching branches. I felt one of the horrible purple blooms press avidly to my throat.

Whatever those blooms looked like, they were not flowers. They were tough as leather, hardy as rubber. And like a rubber suction disk the flower at my throat flattened against my flesh—and held there.

I caught a whirling jumble of blue sky through a purple web of tossing branches as I was whipped off my feet. Then a branch as thick as my thumb coiled around my throat, and the world went black. . . .

You can not afford to miss this fascinating story of a trip through the universe with the speed of light, and the incredible monsters that rule the human race hundreds of millions of years from now. This weird-scientific novel will begin in the January WEIRD TALES:

RULERS OF THE FUTURE

By PAUL ERNST

——ALSO——

BLACK BAGHEELA

By BASSETT MORGAN

A story of brain transplantation, huge apes that spoke with the voices of men, and a swirling, dancing, black leopard-cat in the Maharajah's court.

THE DARK EIDOLON

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A powerful, vivid and eery tale of the tremendous doom that was loosed upon the kingdom of Xylac by a vengeful sorcerer.

CHARON

By LAURENCE J. CAHILL

An unusual story, about a gray man who came back from the grave to comfort the dying and terrify the living—by the author of "They Called Him Ghost."

HANDS OF THE DEAD

By SEABURY QUINN

A gripping story of weird surgery and dual personality—a strange and startling tale of Jules de Grandin.

JANUARY WEIRD TALES - - Out January 1

(Continued from page 776)

the Northwest stories. If you get enough protests against the discard of Northwest Smith, C. L. Moore may give him back to us; let's hope so. Robert E. Howard still pleases with Conan, and Seabury Quinn entertains us as he always has. WEIRD TALES is the only magazine in the field of weird fiction that is worth reading; the imitators of WEIRD TALES quickly pall and do not give the splendid variety of stories that your magazine does."

The Supreme Witch

J. J. O'Donnell, of New York City, writes: "When I was beginning to read WEIRD TALES, several years ago, you published what is perhaps the best weird story that I have ever read: *The Supreme Witch,* I think it was called, by an English author. I was drawn to that issue by the cover design, which was based on that story. The tale has haunted me since then, and I would like to read it again. Won't you publish it in your Weird Story Reprint section?" [You are not alone in your liking for *The Supreme Witch,* as a number of our readers have requested us to reprint this story. E. Hoffmann Price, himself an author of distinction, was loud in his praises of the story when it was printed, back in 1926. It appeared simultaneously in WEIRD TALES and the English magazine, *Pan.* The author, G. Appleby Terrill, has since died. We will publish the story in our reprint section for January.—THE EDITOR.]

Reactions to Black God's Kiss

Vennette Herron, of Darien, Connecticut, writes: "*The Black God's Kiss* is one of the most fascinating stories that I have ever read."

Bert Felsburg, of Frackville, Pennsylvania, writes: "After reading C. L. Moore's *The Black God's Kiss,* I certainly hope Moore can arrange it so that Northwest Smith kills off Jirel of Joiry, and quickly at that. I fail to see where there is any action in Jirel, and I wonder if there is anyone that desires a better story than *Shambleau* or *Black Thirst.* . . . Of all the different characters I have read in numerous magazines, there are none that appeal to me as do Northwest Smith and Conan."

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes: "*The Black God's Kiss* is the best piece of work yet turned out by C. L. Moore, even surpassing *Shambleau*—and that's saying something. . . . I would very much like to read a book-length novel by C. L. Moore."

Fred Anger, of Berkeley, California, writes: "*The Black God's Kiss* was by far the poorest C. L. Moore story yet. The first three of C. L. Moore's tales were excellent, but the last two were rather pediculous."

Manley Wade Wellman, of Wichita, Kansas, writes: "Permit me to congratulate you on the current issue of WT, an outstanding item in the history of an outstanding publication. Particularly good was your lead yarn, *The Black God's Kiss.*"

Alvin Earl Perry, of Rockdale, Texas, writes: "I disagree with you concerning *The Black God's Kiss.* It is not the weirdest story ever told. All of Moore's previous tales surpass it in that particular, especially *Black Thirst.* But, even so, this Jirel of Joiry is good, very good. I'll certainly be satisfied if all of Moore's works in the future feature her."

Edwin F. Caswell, of Dayton, Ohio, writes: "The best story in the October number is *The Seven Geases,* by Clark Ashton Smith. Next is *The Black God's Kiss;* but Clark Ashton Smith's is so good I have cut it out and saved it."

A Few Orchids

Lucy Leonard Kessler, of San Francisco, writes: "I want to tell you how much I and some of my friends enjoy WEIRD TALES. Francis Flagg is our favorite writer of scientific and unusual fiction. We also like very much Clark Ashton Smith. . . . Some of us have especially enjoyed *The Three Marked Pennies,* by Mary Elizabeth Counselman, *The Parasitic Hand* by R. Anthony, and—oh, beautiful and haunting—the poem, *A Ship Is Sailing,* by Katherine van der Veer."

A Plea for Science-Fiction

Stuart Ayers, of Lewiston, Idaho, writes to the Eyrie: "Why so few scientific stories? The horror stories are generally excellent, but they don't compare with a well written science-fiction tale. And you seem to be able to get some very excellent ones at times. *Gray World* by Paul Ernst was fine. It had the ring of truth, and an appropriate strange atmosphere. The old idea was handled mar-

velously. The same description applies to *The Distortion out of Space* by Francis Flagg. The Conan stories by Howard are all good."

Pithy Comments

Robert Bloch, of Milwaukee, writes: "Present WT a knockout, in my opinion, particularly Clark Ashton Smith's fine tale and Julius Long's short. Reprint not so hot —stick to Lovecraft. Cover fine. Conan vile, C. L. Moore splendid."

About Howard's Serial

D. de Woronin, of Southern Rhodesia, Africa, writes: " 'Tis with unholy glee that I read your announcement about the new serial; to wit, *The People of the Black Circle,* by Robert E. Howard. I always thought that the Conan stories were all too short, so you can imagine what a treat in store that is. Perhaps, some day, my other bosom pal, Northwest Smith, will appear in a book-length novel too."

Quinn, Howard vs. Moore, Smith

Ernest H. Ormsbee, of Albany, New York, writes: "When C. L. Moore created *Shambleau,* he not only created a new and enticing character, he created something new in the galleries of the supernatural. This new creation captured the imagination. Northwest Smith was a real flesh-and-blood human being, subject to all the temptations of weak mankind. *Shambleau,* even if it was taken from the Gorgon of mythology, was new and fresh; not a rehash. This was Moore's only outstanding story. The rest have been a phantasmagoria of lights and shadows and whirling things put across for the purpose of drugging the senses—senseless things, intangible, infrangible, inchoate, substanceless things of darkness. . . . When you dub his latest story 'the weirdest story ever told' I have to go to the mat with you on the definition of 'weird'. *Shambleau* was weird; the other creations are more ghastly than ghostly, so unreal they can not be grasped by the mind of reality. Dreams of an opium-eater. Clark Ashton Smith has always been this way. He has never pictured a really weird situation nor drawn a really weird character. His fashionings are always something out of the—so-called—primordial basic things, without shape or form, with no beginnings and no endings, phantasma, illu-

UP TO $5,000.00 LIFE PROTECTION TO BE GIVEN FREE

Will you accept, as our *Christmas Gift to you,* a maximum $1,000.00 Life Protection Contract? Celebrating Interstate Aid's greatest year of growth this big, reliable state chartered company is *now giving away Five Thousand* regular, full-participating *Memberships* absolutely *Free!* Pays up to $1,000.00 for *Natural or Accidental Death* with available benefits up to $2,000.00. Open to every normally healthy man, woman and child, 11 to 80. *No Medical Examination.* Certificate sent by return mail, **paid up and in force for 45 days.** Costs only $1.00 a month thereafter, if you like it. Just send your name, address, age, and beneficiary's name. *Pay nothing.* This offer for limited time only. Write TODAY **INTERSTATE AID ASSOCIATION, Desk W-2, 75 E. Wacker, CHICAGO, ILL.**

62 ART LESSONS

Only 1.95 POST PAID

COURSE COMPLETE

Become Talented Artist with Big Income

This thorough home-study Course teaches Commercial Art, Cartooning, Lettering -- anatomy, perspective, adv layout, short cuts, tricks of profession, etc By Alexander Murray, famous Art School instructor. Natural ability not necessary. Over 915 clear, readable instruction plates require easy, rapid development. 125 sheets of drawing paper included FREE. Complete Course (no more to pay; only $1.95 post-paid -- or send no money, pay postman plus postage. Money back if not delighted after inspecting. Turn your spare time at today into big money tomorrow.

EDUCATIONAL SUPPLY CO. Dept. 180-B RACINE, WIS.

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Not a substitute, not habit forming. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and dependable, easy way to relieve the craving many men have.

Newell Pharmacal Co. Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.

FREE BOOK

Spring Blossoms Perfume

A new and marvelous perfume of excellent quality. A sweet, lovely, fragrant, lasting flower odor. You'll love its enchanting fragrance. Send 25c for generous trial bottle. J. D. Royer, Box 254, Haverhill, Mass.

PILES DON'T BE CUT

UNTIL YOU TRY THIS WONDERFUL TREATMENT

for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a FREE sample of Page's Pile Tablets and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. E. R. Page Co., 2423-B Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.

BE A DETECTIVE

Work home or travel. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE particulars FREE. Write GEORGE T. L. WAGNER, 2640 Broadway, N. Y.

LONELY?

Write me! I will send you FREE my latest descriptive list of clients—many wealthy. Confidential service. Quick Results. P. O. Box S-1877, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

sion without reason or reality. Lovecraft puts beauty into some of his creations. He has a charm of wording that produces pleasurable tingles in the reader's mind, but several of his later stories have approached the phantasmics of the hashish dreamer: the creeping, creaking, billowing, bubbling excrescences of the slimy places. You may call them weird, perhaps they are, but they do not conform to my idea of weird. They are shadows, disappearing things that can not be clearly seen by the human eye, or comprehended by the human brain. Several times you, or some one of your readers, has made the statement that the truly weird was the thing suggested, not the thing described. I will go along with this view to a certain point but I can't subscribe to it after it has reached this certain point. To be charming, a story must contain something of the known and knowable, something of our own workaday world. Seabury Quinn gives it to us. We can follow every step of every one of his creations. He leaves no blank spaces at which we must blink. Robert E. Howard goes down into the unknowable at times, but his characters are understandable, beings with whom we can sympathize and feel; real, not shades and shadows, gibberant mouthings of unseen things. I can, and do, enjoy Quinn and Howard, but, should I see a book on a bookstand bearing the name of C. L. Moore or Clark Ashton Smith, I should pass it by with a glance. I would examine a Lovecraft book before I purchased it. I would buy a Quinn or Howard book 'on faith', feeling that I was going to get my money's worth in pure enjoyment when I got around to the reading of it."

Jirel of Joiry

Virginia Kidd, of Catonsville, Maryland, writes: "What an issue! First, take the cover. I suppose you remember as well as I the beautiful girl on an entrancing green background, caressing a skull, on your cover a few months ago. Well, anyhow, it and this latest cover are the main reasons for Brundage taking on the stature of a genius, in my opinion. And the yarns—words could not possibly do them justice. For instance, Jirel of Joiry; what will she do? What *can* she do to regain her Guillaume? For she must. It's inevitable. Naturally, this in-

(Please turn to page 782)

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for October 1, 1934.

State of Illinois } ss.
County of Cook }

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, managem nt (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are.

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member must be given.)

Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Wm. R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

George M. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

George H. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

P. W. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state). None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

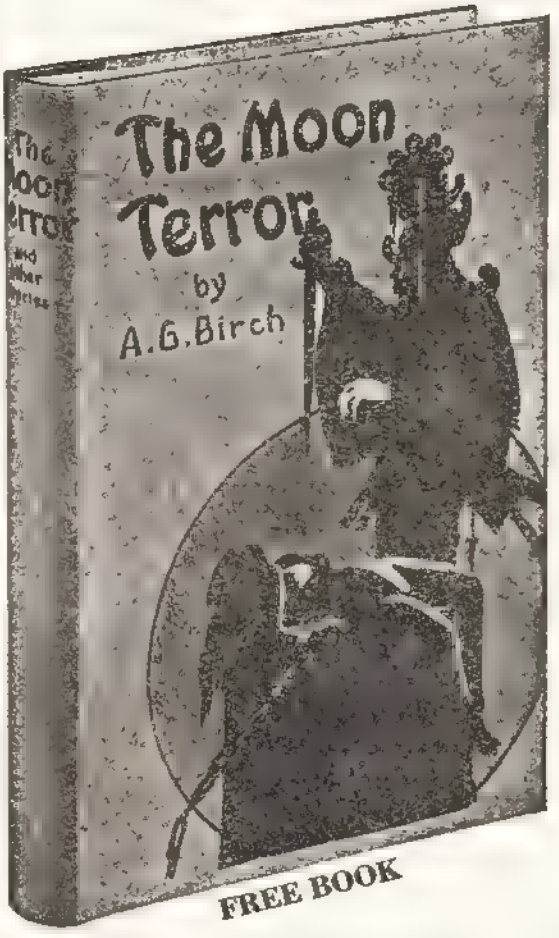
5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is_____ (This information is required from daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1934. M. C. TRAVERS,
[SEAL] Notary Public.

My commission expires February 8, 1937.

A Ghostly Voice from the Ether



Threatened the Lives of All Mankind

THE first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*

Who Was This Dictator of Destiny?

It is important to you that you know the inside story of this tremendous threat. Then read "The Moon Terror," the most enthralling fantastic mystery of the age. You will be amazed when you read the startling facts of this case and the thrilling adventures of Dr. Ferdinand Gresham, the eminent American astronomer, in his encounters with the mysterious "KWO," high priest of the Seuen-H'sin (the Sect of Two Moons).

Here Is How You Can Get This Amazing Book FREE

For a limited time only, we offer this book to you without cost, with each subscription to WEIRD TALES for six months. Simply send $1.50, the regular six months' subscription price for WEIRD TALES, and this book is yours without further cost. You receive the magazine for six months and this book is sent to you free of charge.

Limited Supply

This offer may be withdrawn at any time, so we advise you to order now. *Remember, the supply of books is limited.* Send today!

WEIRD TALES

840 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. S-53 Chicago, Ill.

WEIRD TALES, Dept. S-53,
840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

I enclose $1.50. Send at once, postage prepaid, the book "The Moon Terror," and enter my subscription to WEIRD TALES for six months to begin with the January issue. It is understood this $1.50 is payment in full.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

(Continued from page 780)

spired tale by C. L. Moore takes first place. Science-fiction being one of the four things worth living for—the first, in fact—*Old Sledge* by Paul Ernst is next. The unusually good ending makes Smith's tale come next in the parade of masterpieces." [We trust your curiosity as to Jirel and Guillaume is satisfied by C. L. Moore's story in this issue: *Black God's Shadow*.—THE EDITOR.]

The Three Marked Pennies

M. A. Reynolds, of Glendale, California, writes: "Congratulations on the August number of WEIRD TALES. It was well rounded, with good yarns throughout. My favorite was the little story by Mary Counselman—*The Three Marked Pennies*. It might have come from the imagination of Scheherazade—modernized and brought west. I'm becoming a C. L. Moore fiend, too. Let us have a steady diet of these two authors, less melodrama, and no more cheap nudes on the cover—that's my request, and I think it is one of a chorus."

The Lovely Ladies

Mary A. Conklin, of Coldwater, Michigan, writes: "I note that the protest against Brundage's nudist covers has fallen off somewhat. Glory halleluya! I, myself, like them very much, my favorite lady being the redheaded one. Somehow there seems to be something so clean and clear-cut about her. Something amazonish. I don't care so much about the blond one, for though she is lovely, she doesn't seem so much alive as the redhead and the little brunette. Brundage deals more with deep rich coloring, and, well, blonds just aren't! I remember one cover picture he painted for ORIENTAL STORIES, that concerned a lovely Chinese slave and an Arabian adventurer. It was beautiful. I say more power to Brundage and his lovely ladies. *The Black God's Kiss* is the best story dealing with the ancient gods that I have read in many a long day. I (and I'm sure many others) want to hear a great deal more of Jirel. She's the kind of person I'd like to be myself. A sort of feminine version of Conan the Cimmerian. He, too, is one of my favorites. I wish, though, that his adventures were more closely connected. He hops around so and turns up in such wholly unexpected places. Please, Mr. Howard, don't let him fall in love and settle down. Keep him hopping, but don't leave out the lovely ladies! That's what makes him so interesting."

A New Reader Comments

V. A. McDowell, of Los Angeles, writes: "This is my first letter to the Eyrie, as I

My favorite stories in the December WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1) ----------	----------
(2) ----------	----------
(3) ----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1) ----------	Why? ----------
(2) ----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in WEIRD TALES if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

---

have just lately stumbled on WEIRD TALES in my travels. The story I liked best in the August number was *The Three Marked Pennies*. It was well written and to the point. Personally, I prefer shorter stories of the supernatural type to the longer ones. I also enjoyed your readers' page and your poetry, and I shall certainly look for the magazine on the stands next month."

An Embarrassing Experience

Ian C. Knox, of London, England, writes to the Eyrie: "About the agitation about scientific and space stories: print them. As for the covers, do them as you please—personally, I don't mind either way; but some time ago I was rather embarrassed over one of them. It was the one with the naked girl running with a pack of wolves. Unfortunately, I had a friend with me when I bought it who had never read WT, and his comments on my (supposed) taste in literature were not complimentary. I told him he was wrong, but he obviously did not believe me. Two months later I became a subscriber and so get the magazine through the post. . . . Well, more power to your elbow and may your shadow never grow less."

Weird Story Reprint

Jack McCoy, of St. Louis, writes to the Eyrie: "I like your Weird Story Reprint department about as well as any part of the magazine. But I can not help noticing the immense superiority of the stories from old issues of WEIRD TALES. As a rule, these have it all over the alleged classics that you occasionally use from other sources. Take *Fioraccio* for example. This would be an interesting weird story in any other place except WT. But in comparison with your other stories *Fioraccio* becomes a very commonplace story; for your present authors can write rings around that story. Compared with *The Black God's Kiss* by C. L. Moore, or *The Sleeper* by H. Bedford-Jones, it is nothing at all to write home about. I mention Bedford-Jones' story particularly, because its whole method of presentation is so vastly superior to that of *Fioraccio* in the same issue. *Fioraccio* leaves nothing to suggestion, but *The Sleeper* owes its whole effect to suggestion, and the reader's own imagination is stimulated to building up a horror far greater than could possibly be attained if the author had described in detail

BRAIN MAGIC

The only way to make money, to become a mental giant, is to keep centuries ahead of the rest of the world. Think! Possess the brain of a superman! In three years, under our system, you will know ten times more than the average Ph.D. We can show you how to learn 10 to 50 jobs, trades, and professions and laugh at all bosses. Be something! Learn something! Write today for information.

FUTURIST SOCIETY, 416 Fran' fort Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

EGYPTIAN FIGUROLOGY—For success and happiness. Send birthname and birthdate for analysis, symbology, health, and preferable days. $1.00 with self-addressed, stamped envelope. Eliz Falconer, 48 So. 6th St., San Jose, Calif.

LET MY SPIRITUAL INSIGHT HELP YOU.

I am an understanding friend with whom you can discuss your most secret personal affairs in strictest confidence. Write fully; ask questions. Advice $1.00. J. Benjamin Hobbs, 55 North Providencia, Burbank, California.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

Small ads worth watching.

Business Opportunities

SELL BY MAIL! BOOKS, NOVELTIES! BARgains! Big profits! Particulars Free! K. ELFCO, 525 South Dearborn, Chicago.

Earn Money—At Home

LADIES: EARN MONEY DOING NEEDLEWORK at home. No canvassing. Stamped envelope brings particulars. Royal Novelty Co., Dept. 5, Portsmouth, Ohio.

Wanted—Back Copies

FIRST 3 YEARS OF WEIRD TALES ARE WANTed. Make offer. Charles Bert, 645 North Fifth, Philadelphia, Pa.

Songwriters

WRITERS! POEMS, MELODIES. AMAZING offer. Hibbeler, D-156, 2157 North Avers, Chicago.

Personal

WE BUY LINCOLN HEAD PENNIES. WILL PAY up to $2.00 each if over ten years old. Indian Head Pennies worth up to $51.00 each. Send 10c for BUYING CATALOG. CONTINENTAL COIN CO., INCORPORATED, RK-111 W. Jackson, Chicago.

ENJOY LIVELY INTERESTING CORRESPONDence! Meet your "Ideal Mate" through "Fidelity". Remarkably efficient plan. "Distinctive Individualized Service." Particulars, specimen descriptions (sealed). BOX 128-WT, TIFFIN, OHIO.

LONESOME—BOOK OF PHOTOS AND DESCRIPtions of wealthy members sent free in plain wrapper. The Exchange, AE-3827 Main, Kansas City, Mo.

WHY BE LONESOME? WHEN STAMP WILL find future sweetheart. Heilman, General Delivery, Indianapolis.

Miscellaneous

MYSTIC CURIOS, PSYCHIC AIDS. RARE NOVELties. Scarce Manuscripts. Occult Books. Catalogue 6c. Post Box 196, Chambersburg, Pa.

ABSENT READING WITH ADVICE ON TWO questions. Send full birthdate, $1. Herbert Sloane, 112½ North Walnut, Mansfield, Ohio.

DIVORCES IN MEXICO. FREE INFORMATION and Validity. International Law Office, First National Bank Bldg., El Paso, Texas.

Detectives

BE A DETECTIVE. MAKE SECRET INVESTIGAtions. Experience unnecessary. Write, United Detective System, 1623-T W. Grand, Chicago.

Next Month

HANDS OF THE DEAD

By Seabury Quinn

A TALE of Jules de Grandin—occultist, phantom-fighter and ghost-breaker, detective and physician, vain yet likable—the most fascinating literary figure in modern fiction. Month after month, year after year, Jules de Grandin has grown in the affections of the reading public, and his appearance in a new story is an occasion for rejoicing by many thousands of de Grandin admirers.

THIS new tale about the egotistical yet altogether human and lovable French scientist is fully up to the high standard that you have learned to look for in Seabury Quinn's stories. It will be published complete

in the January issue of

WEIRD TALES

On sale January 1st

To avoid missing your copy, clip and mail this coupon today for SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER.

WEIRD TALES
840 N. Michigan Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed find $1.00 for which send me the next five issues of WEIRD TALES to begin with the January issue ($1.75 in Canada). Special offer void unless remittance is accompanied by coupon.

Name_____

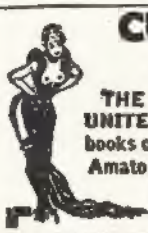
Address_____

City_____ State_____

the things which he merely suggests. The whole attitude of the two authors is different; and in my opinion, Bedford-Jones' method of approach is the very best way to present a weird story to achieve a maximum of effect. It is well to include such stories as *Fioraccio* in your reprint section occasionally, merely because your own authors' stories shine so brilliantly by comparison. Some of the excellent weird stories from old issues that I would like to see reprinted are Greye La Spina's powerful story of the London plague, *The Dead-Wagon;* Edmond Hamilton's little masterpiece about the invisible spider, *The Monster-God of Mamurth;* Frank Belknap Long, Jr.'s goose-flesh tale of other dimensions, *The Hounds of Tindalos;* John Martin Leahy's weird thriller of the South Pole, *In Amundsen's Tent;* and one of Paul Ernst's earlier stories, *A Witch's Curse.* I once heard a radio drama from Mr. Ernst's story, broadcast from a Cleveland station, and it was tremendously effective. And why not reprint the first of the Jules de Grandin stories, *The Horror on the Links?*"

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Write a letter to the Eyrie, or fill out the coupon on page 782, and mail it to us. *The Black God's Kiss,* C. L. Moore's strange story about Jirel of Joiry, easily took first place in your affections as the most popular story in the October issue, as shown by your votes and letters.



CURIOUS BOOKS
Privately Printed

THE LARGEST PUBLISHERS IN THE UNITED STATES of privately printed books on Oriental Love, Uncensored Exotics, Amatory Adventures and other Curious Sex Customs. Send for free Catalogs.

1812
PANURGE PRESS, 70 Fifth Ave., New York
Please send me your illustrated brochures FREE on curious, privately printed books.

Name _____ Age____

Address _____

W. T.—8

NEW LOW PRICES on TIRES

GOOD-YEAR-Firestone-Goodrich-US and OTHERS

$2.15 29x4.40-21

SAVE REAL MONEY!

Why pay high prices for tires? Save money on all standard brands, reconstructed by the special Adamite scientific process. Adams tires are fully guaranteed to give best of service under severest road conditions for 12 full months and are backed by the vast financial resources of this well-known company. Now is the time to buy before prices advance.

FREE UTILITY LIGHT With Each Order for TWO Tires—OR NEW TUBE FREE!

Utility Light, full size, complete with bulb. Replaces flash-light, no battery to replace.

DEALERS WANTED

All Tubes Guaranteed BRAND NEW

BALLOON TIRES			CORD TIRES		
Size Rim	Tire	Tube	Size	Tire	Tube
29x4.40-21	$2.15	$0.85	30x3	$2.25	$0.65
29x4.50-20	2.35	0.85	30x3½	2.35	0.75
30x4.50-21	2.40	0.85	31x4	2.95	0.85
28x4.75-19	2.45	0.95	32x4	2.95	0.85
29x4.75-20	2.50	0.95	33x4	2.95	0.85
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.05	34x4	3.25	0.85
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.05	32x4½	3.35	1.15
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15	33x4½	3.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15	34x4½	3.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15	30x5	3.65	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.15	33x5	3.75	1.45
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15	35x5	3.95	1.55
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15	HEAVY DUTY TRUCKS		
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15	30x5	$4.25	$1.95
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.15	32x6 8 ply	6.95	2.75
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.25	32x6 10"	7.95	2.75
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.25	36x6	8.95	3.95
31x6.50-19	3.60	1.35	34x7	9.95	3.25
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.35	36x8	11.45	3.95
34x7.00-20	4.60	1.65	40x8	13.25	4.15
35x7.00-21	4.60	1.65	ALL OTHER SIZES		

Send $1 deposit with each tire ordered. ($4 with each Truck Tire.) Balance C.O.D. If you send cash in full, deduct 5 per cent. Remember — 12 months' guaranteed service or replacement at ½ price.

ADAMS TIRE & RUBBER CO., Dept. N-385
2515 So. Michigan Avenue CHICAGO, ILL.

12 month Written Guarantee Bond with Every Tire

WEIRD TALES is on sale the 1st of each month

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
----	Jan.	----	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.
----	----	----	Feb.-Mar.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.
Mar.	Mar.	----		----	Mar.	Mar.
Apr.	----	----	Apr.-May	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.
----	May	----		----	May	May
----	June	----	Jun.-Jul.	June	June	June
July	----	July		July	July	July
Aug.	----	----	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.
----	----	----	----	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.
Oct.	----	----	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.
Nov.	----	----	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.
Dec.	----	Dec.	----	Dec.	Dec.	----

These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

WEIRD TALES

840 N. Michigan Ave. **Chicago, Illinois**

SAVE ⅓ to 50% *by* BUYING YOUR RADIO *Direct from* MIDWEST LABORATORIES

Thrill to Guaranteed World-Wide **HIGH FIDELITY** *Performance with This Amazing New* **1935 MIDWEST SUPER** *Deluxe* **16-TUBE ALL-WAVE Radio!**

(ALL FIVE WAVE BANDS)

ONLY RADIO COVERING 9 TO 2,400 METERS.

12,000 MILE TUNING RANGE

WORLD'S GREATEST RADIO VALUE

$57.50 *with New Deluxe Auditorium-Type* SPEAKER

(EXTRA TUBES)

30 Days FREE Trial!

TERMS as low as $5.00 DOWN

BEFORE you buy any radio write for the new FREE 1935 Midwest "Fifteenth Anniversary" catalog and see for yourself the many reasons why 110,000 satisfied customers bought their radios direct from the Midwest Laboratories and saved from ⅓ to ½. Why pay more than the direct-to-you laboratory price?

You, too, can make a positive saving of from 30% to 50% by buying this more economical way. Learn why Midwest outperforms sets costing up to $200.00 and more. Never before so much radio for so little money! Midwest gives you triple protection with: **One-Year Guarantee, Foreign Reception Guarantee, Money-Back Guarantee.**

Only Midwest Gives You Multi-Function Dial

This dial was designed in keeping with the trend of the times, yet is not an airplane dial! It is a many-purpose dial that performs many functions. Now, Midwest guarantees that inexperienced persons can secure good foreign reception. Send for FREE miniature of actual rotating dial which clearly shows these outstanding advantages:

1. Dial calibrated in Kilocycles, Megacycles and Meters;
2. Call letters of American Broadcast Stations printed on dial and illuminated;
3. Slow-Fast, Smooth-Acting Tuning;
4. Station Group Locator;
5. Simplified Tuning Guide Lights;
6. Automatic Select-O-Band Indicator;
7. Illuminated Pointer Indicator;
8. Silent Shadow Tuning—Improvement on Meter Tuning;
9. Centralized Tuning.

New Style Consoles

The Midwest 36-page catalog pictures a complete line of beautiful, artistic de luxe console and chassis in four colors. Write for new FREE catalog today!

Midwest long-range radios are priced as low as . . $27.50

50 ADVANCED 1935 FEATURES

Many exclusive features include: Micro-Tenuator . . . Fidel-A-Stat . . . Separate Audio Generator . . . Ceramic Coil Forms, etc. Only Midwest covers a tuning range of 9 to 2400 meters (33 Megacycles to 125 KC)—enabling you to easily and successfully tune in even low-powered foreign stations up to 12,000 miles away with crystal-clear, loud-speaker reception.

All 5 Wave Bands enable you to enjoy today's finest High Fidelity American programs. In addition, you get Canadian, police, amateur, commercial, airplane and ship broadcasts and derive new delight and new excitement from unequalled world-wide broadcasts... England, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Russia, Australia, etc. Send today for money-saving facts!

SENSATIONAL HIGH FIDELITY RECEPTION

This bigger, better, more powerful, clearer-toned, super selective, 16-tube radio gives you absolute realism—assures you of life-like, crystal-clear tone—unlike anything you have ever experienced before. You will hear one more octave—overtones—that cannot be brought in with ordinary radios. Now, hear every instrument, every voice, every shade and inflection of speech.

Take advantage of the amazing 30-day FREE trial offer. Send for FREE catalog.

Listens to World-Wide Reception

Middletown, O.—Here are some of the stations I have heard: EAQ, Madrid, Spain—DJB, Zeesen, Germany—GSB, GSF, Daventry, England—VK2ME, Melbourne, Australia—VK2ME, Sydney, Australia—HJ2ABA, HJ4ABE, HJ3ABF, Columbia, S. A., and many more. Golden Hatfield, 2202 Grand Avenue.

Peruvian Praises Foreign Reception

Lima, Peru—We have heard the five continents with your Midwest. Have received Madagascar, Sydney, London Paris, Vienna, Moscow, Madrid, New York, Shanghai, Tokio and also South American transmitters. Marquis H. Buchanan, Apartado 96, Plaza San Martin. 171.

DEAL DIRECT WITH LABORATORIES

Increasing costs are sure to result in higher radio prices soon. Buy before the big advance . . . NOW . . . while you can take advantage of Midwest's sensational values . . . no middlemen's profits to pay. You can order your 1935 High Fidelity radio from the new Midwest catalog with as much certainty of satisfaction as if you were to select it in our great radio laboratories. You save 30% to 50% when you buy this popular way . . . you get 30 days FREE trial . . . **as little as $5.00 down** puts a Midwest radio in your home. Satisfaction guaranteed or money back. Write for new FREE catalog today.

SAVE UP TO 50%

MAIL COUPON TODAY! FOR AMAZING 30-DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER AND NEW 1935 CATALOG

MIDWEST RADIO CORP.,
Dept. 827
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Without obligation on my part send me your new FREE 1935 catalog, FREE Miniature Dial, and complete details of your liberal 30-day FREE trial offer. This is NOT an order.

User-Agents Make Easy Extra Money

Check Here for Details ☐

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

MIDWEST RADIO CORP.

DEPT. 827 — CINCINNATI, OHIO, U. S. A.

Established 1920 — Cable Address Miraco. . . . . All Codes